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ISSUE 05 | DECEMBER 2010

2010: THE YEAR IN GAMES

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Better combat! More gore!

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Explore a whole new island paradise in this online driving game PG. 18

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MEET THE STAFF

Wil O'Neal Editor in Chief
Wil missed the company's annual off-site to travel to Frankfurt for this month's *Crysis 2* cover story. The jury is still out as to whether Wil got the better deal.

Andy Eddy Executive Editor
Andy is worried that his living room is too small to "maximize the experience" of the Kinect he just got. After a month of playing Dance Central, he'll fit quite nicely.

Andy "Francis" Salisbury Associate Editor
Back from BlizzCon, Francis is all, "WoW this and WoW that." Relax already. No one cares...except for the 100 billion people who pay Blizzard $15 a month so they don't have to meet girls.

Jenny Esdaile Art Director
Wil has taken to humming the "Imperial Theme" whenever Jenny walks by. This isn't to say that Jenny isn't a great person. That's not it at all. Jenny is great. Oh, no...can't breathe...

Jillian Pierce Designer
This month, Jillian wrote her first game review ever. As a *Fallout* fan, we not only "made" her design the *Fallout: New Vegas* review, we also "made" her write the review.

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

The end of the year is upon us. Aside from all of the holiday cheer, Christmas, Chanukah, and Kwanzaa gifts, now is the time when many people like to reflect on the year that has passed. While for many this means taking stock of their lives and other such uninteresting things, here at @GAMER this is when we like to look back at 2010 from a gamer's perspective. 2010 was definitely a great year for games, so be sure to read our feature story, 2010: The Year in Games. We're sure that many of you will no doubt be heartbroken that Naughty Bear didn't make the list, so be sure to send us feedback about how 2010 went for you.

This year may also be known as the one that Sony and Microsoft got into the motion-gaming scene with their respective Move and Kinect controllers. We already reviewed Sony's Move Controller, so we were super-stoked to finally get a Kinect sensor in. Of course, I was skeptical at first, but having spent some time working up a sweat to Dance Central, even an old dog like me may be sold on it. That said, don't miss our review of the Kinect sensor and a bevy of Kinect-enabled titles that showed up at our front door.

And, lastly, don't forget to check out the @GAMER podcast at http://www.atgamerpodcast.com/ and stay-tuned for the @GAMER iPad app.

William O'Neal
Editor in Chief

Staff_

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▲ So dark, so creepy. *Alan Wake* is one of the scariest games we've ever played.

TOP OF THEIR GAME

What do you guys think makes developers like Valve, Remedy, and Blizzard so good at what they do? They always seem to have great visuals, sound, controls, story, gameplay, and content no matter what project or IP they're working with. What makes them able to put out such great products time and time again?

—Adam via e-mail

ED: Developers like those mentioned generally aren't afraid to try new things. And, sure, while that's a bit of a blanket statement, it's true. For example, Valve's Steam digital distribution service (now going on its eighth year) currently has more than 30 million users, *World of Warcraft* is the world's biggest MMO, and *Alan Wake* is an absolute masterpiece. Plus, each has their own veterans that help turn good games into great games. We're looking at you, Gabe Newell and Chris Metzen.

I randomly recieved an issue of @GAMER in the mail. The coupons alone might make it worth the subscription fee!

—@aaronfaby via Twitter

ED: The coupons alone? Sure, those are great (and don't miss out on this issue's), but you can't forget about our hands-on previews and reviews! Flip a few pages, and we're pretty sure that you'll like what you see. (Scout's honor.)

Man, you guys have the coolest jobs... just playing games all day.

—Mike via e-mail

ED: We have to agree that we have great jobs, but there's far more than playing games. For example, we attend a lot of meetings with publishers and developers to talk about upcoming games, sometimes without seeing live gameplay. And there are trade shows, such as E3 and TGS, to learn about the latest wares.

Most of our time, though, is spent putting the magazine together, which involves lots of writing, compiling screenshots, and poring over page layouts. And don't forget the time and effort that goes into replying to reader letters. But we'll never whine, because it's still fun.

I just read your response in the October issue of @GAMER in regards to a question about *StarCraft* being on the Xbox and PlayStation. I believe the person that submitted that question may have ran into the same dilemma that I did. I remember renting *StarCraft* from Blockbuster on more than one occasion and I could've sworn it was on the Xbox, because they don't rent PC games. Through some research, I realized that it had been released on the Nintendo 64 as well, a mere generation before the original Xbox. Perhaps that is what got him confused?

—Robert via e-mail

ED: Thanks for bringing that up, Robert. Andy had hoped to discuss *StarCraft 64*, as it was called, but didn't have the space in that column. For those interested, the game in question was developed by Blizzard Entertainment and Mass Media Interactive Entertainment, and published by Nintendo in June 2000.

With some great new Wii titles like *Epic Mickey* and *Kirby's Epic Yarn* on the way, does Nintendo have any plans to offer any downloadable content (such as new levels)? Considering their noted lack of support so far, it would be encouraging for those of us who have dusty Wiis!

—Shane via e-mail

ED: You know, Shane, we're not too sure. While the Wii's online store has been filled with plenty of great titles, there has been a significant lack of DLC. The possibility is there, but it's not something we'd hold our breath for—though we'd be surprised if it's something Nintendo avoids forever. It has to see the currency its competitors are bringing in with their DLC.

Do you think there will be a third *Uncharted*?

—Chris via e-mail

ED: You're someone who gets straight to the point, aren't you, Chris? Well, then so will we. Yes!

BEST BUY CUSTOMER REVIEWS & RATINGS

WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

What are you playing now? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Let the other @GAMER readers know what you think—send in a short 50- to 100-word review to reviews@atgamermagazine.com, and we'll repost some of them here each issue.

Submit your review to:
reviews@atgamermagazine.com

SPIDER-MAN: SHATTERED DIMENSIONS

What a treat! I don't think I could have played another Spider-Man game set in New York (or any other sandbox game for that matter). I love the variety of environments, and the stealthy Noir levels will please *Arkham Asylum* fans. Goal-centric players will really enjoy the Web of Destiny, which encourages the replaying of levels to complete different challenges.
Score: 4.5/5

—Ricky Mumford

▶ **TOURNAMENTS!**
World of Warcraft arena teams fought in the BlizzCon tournament for big cash prizes.

▼ **STEADY HANDS**
Blizzard's top artists put their skills to work on stage, drawing familiar characters.

▶ **NOT A TERRORIST!**
Jim Raynor insists that the suit adds 100 pounds, but we didn't believe him.

▼ **GALLERIA OF ORCS**
Original prints were on display in the art gallery.

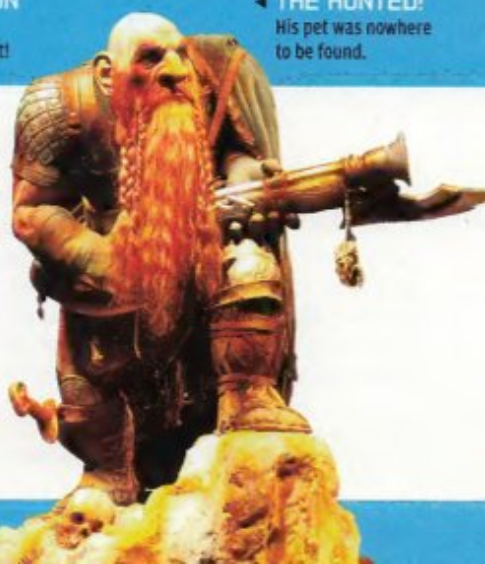
◀ **OLD-SCHOOL, BABY**
The vintage arcade was a great place to play classic titles.

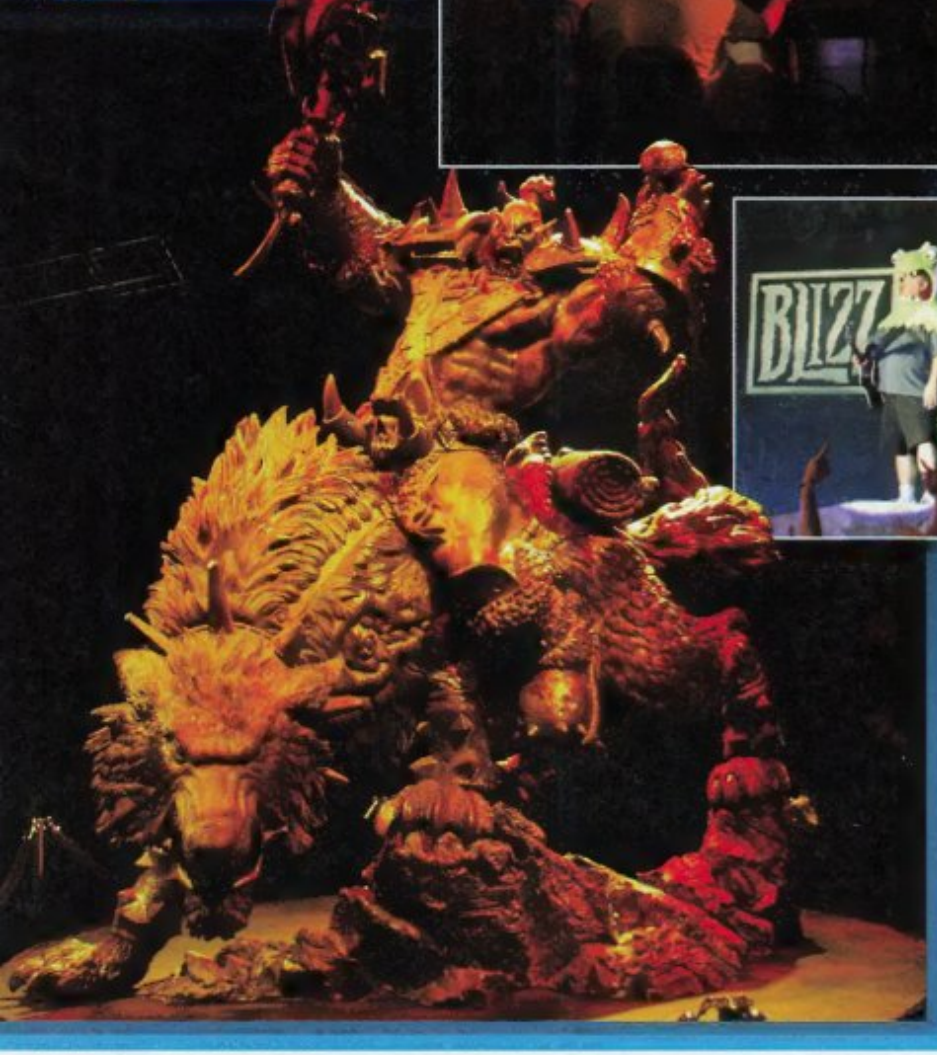
▲ **TALLER IN PERSON**
It's pretty tough to beat Illidan at a staring contest!

◀ **THE HUNTED!**
His pet was nowhere to be found.

BLIZZCON

Blizzard's annual gaming convention never ceases to amaze, and this year's was no exception





▲ **WORTH THE WAIT** There were hundreds of PCs on hand that let BlizzCon'ers play *Diablo III*, *StarCraft II*, and *Cataclysm*!

◀ **TENACIOUS D!** They rocked the house. They had Dave Grohl on drums. Our faces were melted.

▲ **DRAWN ON THE 'CON** The graffiti wall was a huge draw (see what we did there?). Players from all around signed their character's names and servers. Not many phone numbers, though.

Every year, Blizzard rents out the Anaheim Convention Center in sunny southern California for a convention of monolithic proportions. Blizzard fans travel from all around the world, just for a chance to get their hands dirty with the latest updates on the company's games, hear their favorite developers give massive panel discussions about upcoming content, and even have their pictures taken with some Night Elf ladies.

This year's convention offered a first look at *Diablo III*'s new Demon Hunter class, which promises to dole out the hurt on Diablo's minions with the help of her two crossbows and a slew of traps. Given that she's the last class to be revealed, the world's fingers have collectively crossed that we'll hear a release date sometime soon.

While there weren't any official announcements on new content for *StarCraft II*, the powerful world editor has been put to use by the mod community, making a slew of custom maps. With some support from Blizzard, maps like Left 2 Die, Auir Chef, Blizzard DOTA, and Starjeweled will likely be ready to play on Battle.net shortly.

Sadly, this year's BlizzCon lacked major annoucements. Blizzard's mystery MMO remains shrouded in... well, mystery. There's no word about *StarCraft II*'s Heart of the Swarm expansion, and we didn't get any teasers for what's to come after Cataclysm. Oh well... this just means that we'll have to look forward to BlizzCon 2011, and it'll give us some extra time to work on our costumes. (Andy S. is planning to go as a Pandaren.)

NEXUIZ

An indie first-person shooter?

It's rare for an indie developer to work on a first-person shooter, and rarer still to see such a game coming to consoles. But this is exactly the case with IllFonic's upcoming *Nexuiz*, slated for release later this year and on both PSN and Xbox Live (a PC version is in the works as well). A fast-paced, highly competitive arena FPS, the title uses the same tech that powers the upcoming *Crysis 2*, and will be the first downloadable title to do so.

"It can be pretty tricky at times because we always have to figure out how to make things work on our limited budget," says IllFonic president Chuck Brungardt of entering the crowded, competitive genre. "If we fall short on certain areas of the game, we won't have the funds to go back and fix them like larger-budgeted games can—so we need to make sure we get it right the first time. However, I think it's awesome to show people videogames can be made on reasonable budgets and still stand up to the blockbusters."

Fortunately, *Nexuiz* wasn't started from scratch; in fact, the game has actually existed as an open-source PC shooter for years, and IllFonic started by buying the rights for a commercial release of the game. This has, of course, presented its own hurdles: "Whenever you're dealing with a community that stands behind free and open software, it can be very tricky making everyone happy with the future closed-source version," says Brungardt. "We are trying to keep it true to the original *Nexuiz* design released back in 2005, while making it work for consoles and evolving the genre. The original *Nexuiz* creators are very supportive of the project, but not everyone is going to be as supportive."

ARENA-STYLE

The game tells the story of the Kavussari and Forsellians, two once-feuding factions who have come to an uneasy peace. To maintain the ceasefire, the intergalactic union they belong to has forced them to engage in gladiatorial arena combat. Naturally, that's where you (and your many guns) step in. The resulting gameplay is, as mentioned, arena-style—fast-paced, full of weapon drops and strategically minded level designs. "We wanted to keep it where twitch gaming rules supreme," says lead designer Kedhrin Gonzalez. "So we stayed true to what an arena FPS is at the core. What we did differently was add new features that upgrade it for modern gamers, [and others] for veterans of the genre."

GOT POWER-UPS?

The game includes, for example, a new Dynamic Mutator system that allows you to change the rules of the match as you play. When you get a kill streak, three random options appear on-screen, and you're able to call in one of them to drastically change the match in your favor. "Think of a Dynamic Mutator almost like picking up an item in *Mario Kart*," says Gonzalez. Heightening the experience further is the social/community resource built right into the game, as well as massive sponsored tournaments every year using an automated tournament system.

With its new CryEngine tech, futuristic Victorian art style, and expanded gameplay ideas, *Nexuiz* is certainly a far cry from the open-source original. And when this new-and-improved boom-boom room opens for business, we'll see if it can unseat some of the genre heavyweights in the process.

01

02

03

04

SUPAFREAK PHYSIQUE

IllFonic's co-founder is musician/producer Raphael Saadiq, and music has been one of the more important elements in his studio's games (*Nexuiz* and the upcoming *Ghetto Golf*). "Music is a way for us to help create an immersive new world [and set] mood," says Brungardt. "We've been listening to a lot of Flying Lotus and DaM-FunK recently, and Raphael reached out to them to see if they would be into working on tracks for *Nexuiz*. They recently stopped by and dropped off some new tracks they've been working on—amazing sounds!" IllFonic also recorded a 40-piece orchestra for the *Nexuiz* theme song, which was produced by Raphael Saadiq and arranged by Paul Riser (one of the original Funk Brothers from Motown).

"WE WANTED TO KEEP IT TO WHERE TWITCH GAMING RULES SUPREME."

— KEOHRIN GONZALEZ, LEAD DESIGNER

AN ARRAY OF WEAPONS

▲ It looks a lot like *Quake III Arena*, doesn't it? But most hardcore players would agree that's a good thing.

▲ Yep, definitely feeling that *Quake III* vibe. The futuristic Victorian aesthetic is unique to *Nexuiz*, though.

▲ Level design can make or break a competitive FPS, so hopefully *Nexuiz*'s arenas will bring the frantic fun.

NEW BEJEWELED TO DROP

You'll recognize the gems, but...

Bejeweled is everywhere—computers, game consoles, smartphones, and even other websites (the speedy *Bejeweled Blitz* that's playable as a Facebook app is our personal fave). It's no surprise, then, that game maker PopCap wouldn't let its fave franchise stagnate, which is why the company recently announced *Bejeweled 3*, slated for release on December 7.

While its designers could have released essentially the same game with prettier gems, 3D, or some other gimmick, PopCap calls this "the first true sequel... in more than six years." You start with four "main" games—Classic, the standard timed game; Lightning, a fast-paced variation; Quest, a series of 40 matching puzzles/challenges; and Zen, a neverending version of Classic. Each main mode will unlock a "secret" game when a milestone is hit, giving you four more modes. My favorite is Butterfly, where you have to make matches that include colored insects—but if one hits the top of the board, a spider eats it to end the game. Look for a detailed review in our January 2010 issue.

▲ **GEM QUEST**
This is the Quest Mode hub. Each of the green blobs is a different challenge for you to beat.

◀ **IT STARTS HERE**
It's the last place you get to relax. Even the Zen mode is only slightly chill.

EVENTS

YOU CAN'T MISS!

▼ Emilie Chang takes Best Buy customers on a romp through New Vegas.

◀ NEW VEGAS
Las Vegas has definitely seen better days.

Up close and personal in the world of *Fallout: New Vegas*

Best Buy isn't just about midnight openings. To coincide with the launch of *Fallout: New Vegas*, Best Buy partnered with IGN.com, Bethesda, and Obsidian to host an in-store live webcast event promoting the October 19th release of *Fallout: New Vegas*.

The event was hosted by Emilie Chang, and Best Buy gave *Fallout* fans an exclusive opportunity to get a look at nearly 60 minutes of raw, unedited gameplay. Prior to the event, fans were given a chance to submit questions for Josh Sawyer, Obsidian's project director on the New Vegas development, to answer during the event. From that collection, the best fan questions were selected and then fielded during the live event; the lucky winners were awarded with a copy of *Fallout: New Vegas Collector's Edition*. The grand-prize winners also received *Fallout: New Vegas* neon signs.

Be sure to keep an eye on our calendar for other in-store live webcast events and midnight openings.

LET'S DISH!

TOP 5

HERE ARE THE TOP FIVE GAMES THAT ARE OCCUPYING MY TIME THIS MONTH:

05.
Call of Duty: Black Ops (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)
If on the off chance you're one of the five people who hasn't already grabbed Black Ops, make sure it's on your radar. It's being made by Treyarch, the team behind CoD: World at War. All the cool kids'll be playing it.

04.
Assassin's Creed. Brotherhood (PS3, Xbox 360)
Just a year after the release of Assassin's Creed 2, Ezio is back for another adventure in Renaissance Italy. This will be the first game in the series to offer multiplayer.

03.
Blood Stone 007 (PS3, Xbox 360, PC, DS)
James Bond is back for the 23rd time and this time he's serious. Blood Stone will have an original story and will star Daniel Craig as James Bond. The game tosses in combat driving with the usual shooting.

02.
NBA Jam (Wii)
Since its arcade debut, NBA Jam has been re-released numerous times. The current-gen console iteration has a roster of unlockable characters, including Barack Obama, Sarah Palin and the Beastie Boys. Boom-shaka-laka!

01.
Disney Epic Mickey (Wii)
Warren Spector and Junction Point Studios have been working on a darker, more mature Disney game. You play Mickey as he enters a world of forgotten Disney characters, armed with only a magical paintbrush. Believe it!

CGAMER's resident girl about town dishes about the fifth annual [illegible] green and scaly gentleman she

This Month I saw...

IndieCade

IndieCade started in 2005 and each year calls together the people who make indie games and the people who play them. IndieCade celebrates indie games, which don't have major studio backing or million-dollar budgets. I was lucky enough to attend the IndieCade Awards, which was hosted by LeVar Burton. Yes, Geordi from "Next Generation"! Gaming celebs in attendance included Adam Sessler, Alison Haislip, Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafler and even the Old Spice Guy, Isaiah Mustafa. Some of the night's big winners included *B.U.T.T.O.N.* and *A Slow Year*. Haven't heard of the games? Google them. Anyone looking into getting into the gaming industry should pay attention to indie games. They're a great way to get your foot in the door and an even better way to find great games. But my highlight of the night was getting to meet Godzilla. Why was he there? I'm not sure, but I'll never forget the time we spent together.

◂Trust Me [L] When B.U.T.T.O.N. says to lie down you'd best listen.

◂My Zilly-kins [R] Our time together was cut short when security intervened.

Tips and Tricks: Be a Kid Again.

Hello childhood. I've missed you. More mature gamers are in for a treat this holiday season thanks to games that aren't so mature. If you're in the mood to recapture your childhood simply plug your Wii back in. First you've got Disney Epic Mickey, an action-platformer starring Mickey Mouse. But it's not solely for kids, as it's being created by Warren Spector and will take a darker approach than most any other Disney game. If you're more in the mood for retro-themed excellence then why not pick up Donkey Kong Country Returns? DKCR is a 2.5D side-scroller that picks up after the classic SNES games. The icing on the nostalgic cake is GoldenEye 007. Yes, the grand-daddy of multiplayer FPS games is back with a facelift. The N64 game you loved is being remade with a ton of changes and upgrades.

And PS3ers can enjoy the return of Sly Cooper. The Sly Collection will contain remastered versions of Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus, Sly 2: Band of the Thieves, and Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves.

▲13 years later and Diddy's still lookin' pretty spry.

▲Before infamous Sucker Punch made Sly, and it was good.

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DVD
games

Featured Game:
GRAND THEFT IPAD

This excellent port of an already-good game shows the world how to do iPad ports justice.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS HD

$9.99
Rockstar Games, rockstargames.com

You may have played Chinatown Wars on the Nintendo DS or the iPhone, but the iPad version adds more than just the expected high-def graphics treatment (now at 1024x768) and gee-whizzier lighting effects. It's got a new control layout that you can customize, though accelerometer-based tilt controls are strangely absent. But the sandbox world of *Grand Theft Auto* is here, with a single-player campaign of terror that definitely wasn't censored to make it into the App Store. Plus, mini-games exploit the iPad's touchscreen, having you scratch lottery tickets, hotwire a car, and mix up a Molotov cocktail. This one isn't for the kids, but fans of GTA will love it.

The cut-scenes are in a cool comic-book style.

Use the D-pad or just tap to move and attack.

UNDERWORLDS ULTIMATE EDITION

$1.99
Pixel Mine, pixelminegames.com

Underworlds will appeal to both seasoned action-RPG fans and newbies to the genre—being able to simply tap the screen is much easier than juggling a keyboard and mouse. The single-player campaign has you tromping around a slightly blocky-looking world, collecting gold, killing enemies, finding treasure, leveling up, boosting your abilities, and completing quests—nice and short, with plenty of autosaves. It's hack, slash, and repeat, just as a good dungeon crawler should be.

Addictive, strategic, and cute: the iPad trifecta.

CUT THE ROPE HD

$1.99
Chillingo, chillingo.com

If you've ever overdosed on cuteness (that stuff can put you in the hospital) you should probably steer clear of this one. It's adorable, from the graphics to the music to the wee little monster (named Om Nom!) who lives in a box and eats candy. Each level is a puzzle, with you cutting ropes to swing the candy around the board to collect stars and wind up in the monster's mouth. It's hyper-addictive, easy to learn, and ever more challenging.

Yeah, see that you don't!

SUPER MEGA WORM

$0.99
Deceased Pixel, deceasedpixel.com

Terrorize the countryside with a giant carnivorous worm that looks like the horrors from the movie "Tremors." The look and feel are strictly 8-bit, and you get a few control schemes to choose from, with mastering the steering providing most of the challenge. (I recommend using the D-pad, accessible in the settings.) The 24 levels and three extra abilities provide enough variety. It's Universal, so you also get a native iPhone/iPod touch version.

If Rube Goldberg made an iPad game...

ENIGMO DELUXE

$2.99
Pangea Software, pangeasoft.net

Enigmo was one of the first instant classics invented for the iPhone, and this big-screen version ups the ante with a built-in level editor. (You can also create levels in the Mac or PC version of *Enigmo* and play them in *Enigmo Deluxe*, or *Enigmo* on the iPhone.) Your goal is to guide droplets of water to the finish line by bouncing them off various objects—it's simple to learn but hard to put down.

Your city starts out small, but won't stay that way for long.

WE CITY FOR IPAD

free
ngmoco, ngmoco.com

If you've tired of We Rule, We Farm and all their variations—or better yet, if you still haven't attacked any of those clones—*We City* takes the concept to a cheerful urban setting. It's a FarmVille-style game, where you grow your city with buildings, make and sell items for gold and XP, and visit your other friends on the Plus+ network (which is required to play). The game's free but has optional in-app purchases.

▼ Things on this island get really weird really fast—not unlike at the @GAMER office.

RETURN TO MYSTERIOUS ISLAND DELUXE

$3.99
Anuman Interactive, anuman.fr

A sequel of sorts to Jules Verne's novel "Mysterious Island," this point-and-click adventure has you exploring, well, a mysterious island as shipwrecked navigator Mina. With its ambient island sounds, detailed graphics, and easy-to-use inventory system, you'll be free to get lost in the puzzles and unraveling the storyline. And if you get stuck, a walkthrough is included right in the game. It's more thinky than shooty, but I like that.

Friendly Units Required

ONE FOR TWO

2 GAMERS, 1 IPAD

MULTIPLAYER RULES, BUT IF YOU DON'T HAPPEN TO HAVE TWO IPADS LYING AROUND EVERY TIME YOU WANT TO SCHOOL YOUR FRIEND, ALL THESE GAMES LET TWO PLAYERS DUKE IT OUT ON THE SAME IPAD. PLUS, THEY'RE GENERALLY AWESOME.

01 **INGENIOUS FOR IPAD** $3.99, usmiphone.de/genial_en.html
Reiner Knizia's classic board game lets two friends play side-by-side or sitting across from each other. Or play the computer, a solitaire version, or even a tournament.

02 **SHOT SHOT SHOOT** $1.99, eriksvedang.com/shoot
The minimal aesthetic and painfully hip soundtrack add to the fun of blasting a friend on the other side of the iPad in this action-strategy shooter.

03 **WINGS** $0.99, cerebralgardens.com
This top-down arcade shooter has a single-iPad two-player mode, as well as network play against three iPads, iPhones, or iPod touches over Bluetooth and Wi-Fi.

04 **FLY CONTROL HD** free, invictus-games.com
A layer of insect cuteness dresses up this *Flight Control* clone, with across-the-iPad multiplayer and single-player on four maps. It's a gem, especially for free.

05 **OGS** free, versuspad.com
This two-player strategy board game is like animated chess—each colorful piece moves only one way, some for offense and some for defense. Bombs away.

06 **STEVE YOUNG FOOTBALL HD** $4.99, steveyoungfootball.com
Named for the king of the QB sneak, you and a friend fling Steve Young into the end zone, or set up obstacles to try and stop him.

07 **TOWERMADNESS HD** $7.99, global.com2us.com
3D tower defense with split-screen multiplayer? Sign us up! Plus it's got an awesome single-player mode, and new maps are added frequently.

08 **CONQUIST** $3.99, schmeuk.com/conquist
A gorgeous *Risk*-like board game, *Conquist* lets you huddle up with five other peeps around one iPad, or send in CPU-controlled bots.

09 **UNO HD** $4.99, gameloft.com
The classic card game has several multiplayer modes, including single-iPad action for up to four players total. You can even customize the rules.

10 **FOOSBALL HD** $2.99, foosball.illusionlabs.com
If everyone on Earth agreed to let a rousing game of *Foosball* rightfully settle all interpersonal conflicts, we'd finally achieve some dang peace and harmony.

CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2010

■ Game Release Date ■ @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			01 ↘ 1997 – *Quake II* goes gold.	02 ↘ 1999 – *Quake III Arena* ships. (Todd Hollenshead's plan)	03 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 6	04
05	06	07 ■ TRON: Evolution ■ WORLD OF WARCRAFT: Cataclysm	08	09	10 ↘ 1993 – *Doom*'s first public release.	11 ↘ 2006 – 140,000+ people sign up for the North American beta for *Halo 3*. The sign-up page promptly dies.
12	13	14 ↘ 2001 – Australia bans the sale of *Grand Theft Auto III*, due to the Office of Film and Literature Classification refusing to rate the game.	15	16 1993 – Toys 'R' Us stops selling *Night Trap* for the Sega CD due to complaints about violence.	17 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 7	18 ↘ 1998 – *Tribes* goes gold. *Baldur's Gate* goes gold.
19 Jillian's Birthday! Yay! ↘ 2001 – *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* goes gold.	20	21 ↘ 2005 – Over 18,000 *World of Warcraft* accounts are banned for farming gold.	22	23	24	25 CHRISTMAS DAY
		29	30 ↘ 2005 – *Asheron's Call 2* shut down.	31 ■ THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 8 NEW YEAR'S EVE		

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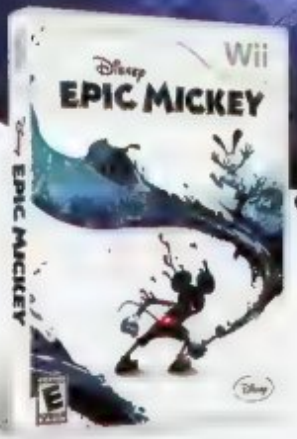

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EVERYONE E Cartoon Violence ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Wii™

disneyepicmickey.com

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Disney

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TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2

We've got to go back to the island, Kate!

• Words: Tom Price

Most people think there are only two basic kinds of driving games: arcade racers and hardcore simulators. For *Test Drive Unlimited 2*, the actual underlying gameplay—at least in terms of control and overall feel—is somewhere in the middle of those two extremes. But in addition to a slew of new features (weather, cops, off-road racing and more), *TDU2* is more about the experience of being an owner and racer of amazing cars in an island paradise. I can't exactly relate, but I sure would like to learn how.

Like its predecessor, *TDU2* plops you down on a virtual island which is a 1:1 scale re-creation of a real-world place—this time Ibiza rather than Oahu. And again like before, *TDU2* gives you free rein to explore the island in a series of high-performance automobiles and take part in a variety of races and speed challenges, which earn you more money you can put toward faster and more expensive cars, not to mention larger and more expensive houses with bigger garages to contain your growing fleet of sweet whips. It's a bit like a role-playing game for cars. A "car-PG," if you will.

The makers of the game would probably prefer you think of it as an MMORPG for cars, though the term they made up is M.O.O.R.: Massively Open Online Racing. In the online mode, you share the island with other real-world players, whom you can race after casually crossing paths or challenge in involved multi-race championships. There's still plenty to do in single-player, too, with an in-game narrative about becoming a racing champion and living the life of your avatar, customizing his or her looks and living spaces. It's basically a "rich American" simulator.

Building the game around this narrative should prove a bit more compelling than just a series of disconnected races. Winning money and buying cars, clothes, and houses may seem a bit like *The Sims* on wheels, but *Test Drive Unlimited 2* is merely trying to give you a taste of the good life.

IT'S A BIT LIKE A ROLE-PLAYING GAME FOR CARS... A "CAR-PG"

LEVEL ME UP

Like any good character-driven RPG, *TDU2* tracks your progress in a number of different categories. Your overall level is dependent on four things: Competition points are earned by winning sanctioned races; Collection points are earned by buying new cars, clothes, houses, and upgrades; Discovery points by exploring the island and competing in special events; and Social points by playing online or starting or joining racing clubs. Overall, there are 37 levels to achieve.

▲ The most expensive luxury cars can hover silently above the road.

The meticulously modeled interiors are really impressive, right down to the spilled Big Gulp residue on the console.

Fresh out of the carwash. Now just try not to park under any seagulls.

LET'S HIT GOODWILL

Your avatar can actually get out of the car once in a while, but it's mainly just to go shopping or hang out in a racing club. Go to clothing stores and the hairdresser to find your look (you can even re-do your face at the plastic surgeon's), because you'll want to look really good for your appearances in the cut-scenes. Driving in style isn't just about your rims.

▲ Achievement unlocked: Dress like a wealthy twit.

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2

INFO
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Eden Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-8 players per race, 2-32 players in avatar spaces

GENRE
Racing

RELEASE DATE
First quarter 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Racing fans who love fast cars, island getaways, and playing with their friends

BEST BUY

Preorder Exclusive
500 bonus points ($10 value) and special-edition Aston Martin DBS for RZGC members who preorder

With over 2,000 km of roads to discover your map will be your best friend. Your silent, papery best friend.

Only in one racers can see the prism-shaped lines that float over roads around the world.

MAP MY RACE:

One of the key components of TDU2 is the sweet three-dimensional map that you can access at any time you're out cruising. Not only will it allow you to set markers to the next event or car dealership you want to go to, but it will also show you everything from active championships to carwashes to houses for sale. It's also a great tool for finding shortcuts and locating roads you are yet to explore. You should seek those roads out by the way; it's the only way to discover everything that the island of Ibiza has to offer.

READY FOR TAKEOFF
TDU2's all about giving you expensive luxury cars and simulating the high-end lifestyle that often goes with them.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Have you tried the original game? It lacks some of the great new features of the sequel, but lets you familiarize yourself with the island of Oahu.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- Open-world racing makes for fun exploration and a ton of driving variety
- Fun car details, such as windows, doors, and drop tops that open and close

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- We'd love a rewind feature
- Driving physics may not be realistic enough for some

121: FRIM-WARE

Races and cups and multiplayer challenges of all stripes will give you plenty of opportunity to gain in-game cash, but what about just cruising around? If you want to earn some cash in free ride mode, just take advantage of the F.R.I.M. system, which pays you to cruise and explore. What a life!

SKY

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BODYCOUNT

Happiness is a warm assault rifle • Words: Tom Price

Who ever said shooters have to be about something? Sure, some people want to pretend to be a space marine or a special ops soldier or some other subject of a weird übermensch empowerment fantasy as they blast away with realistic-looking firearms. But what about those of us who just like blowing stuff up for the thrill of it?

The makers of Codemasters' upcoming shooter Bodycount obviously like shooting stuff up just for the fun of it, as evidenced by the team's previous project, Black. Released by EA for the Xbox and PS2 back in 2006, Black featured real-world weapons, but was definitely not about real-world tactics or learning ninja skills. It was nothing more than a symphony of bullets and an orgy of explosions. Bodycount seeks to ratchet up those same themes manyfold.

Set in a dystopian future not too far away on the imaginary timeline, Bodycount features a main character, Jack (aka, you), who has been contracted by a mysterious cult-like agency called "The Network" to take out "targets" (aka, bad guys who shoot back at you). These "targets" may be people, but when killed—by an explosion or a hail of gunfire or a well-placed headshot from your realistic and currently available-in-real-life weapons—will drop glowing orbs that help you build up a kill-meter that further pumps up your overall score. Points for killing people, mysterious glowing orbs dropping everywhere...what is this, a videogame or something?

▲ I tried to tell you distributing SMGs at the homeless camp was a bad idea, but noooo...

That's not to say the enemies are mindless drones who will just run straight at you. They'll follow a class system wherein different enemies will have specific tasks and work together in teams. So you might just have to think about strategy, even if you don't have the time or the cover to properly do so.

Surely the story will be more sensationalized than the typical global-political dreck of so many "realistic" shooters, but plot is irrelevant for a game like this. What does seem relevant is the level of destruction you'll be able to inflict, not just to organic enemies, but to the environment around you. Practically everything will be destructible, including the cover your enemies hide behind...and, by extension, the cover you hide behind as well. This is no time for careful covering of routes and intricately arranged crossfires. It's kill or be killed at a thousand rounds a minute.

Plenty of shooters let you pretend to be James Bond or some other faceless super-soldier. What's impressive about Bodycount is its commitment to fun. When having a bloody good time is your first priority, how can you really go wrong?

BODYCOUNT IS IMPRESSIVE IN ITS COMMITMENT TO FUN

Though referred to simply as "targets," the dudes you're going bullet-to-bullet with actually do have some personality and motivation. In the early stages, depicted here in the level called "Freeway Underpass" (go figure), you're thrown by the Network into a conflict between the mysterious, fascist-like faction that turns out to be the game's main bad guys and some local fighters who just want them out of their town. Who you kill and don't kill is not important, as long as you kill the bad guys. But throughout the story you'll have to grapple with the question: Who really are the bad guys here?

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

BODYCOUNT

INFO
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Co-op and competitive play, online only

GENRE
First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE
January 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Shooter enthusiasts

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you've never played the original Black, you should consider it. You can download it from the Xbox Originals marketplace.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Over-the-top bullet-flying action
- Complete and utter destructibility in the environments
- Pulse-pounding, explosive action (did we already mention the action?)

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Word is, the game's visionary, Stuart Black, has left Codemasters before the release date

GAMEPLAY \\

NOWHERE TO RUN TO, NOWHERE TO HIDE

Environmental destructibility could make a cover system useless, but in Bodycount that only makes it more detailed and complex. Instead of being able to toggle whether you're behind cover or not, you can now choose where you want to pop out from behind cover. You can even peek around and shoot through the holes that enemies have made in the crate in front of you.

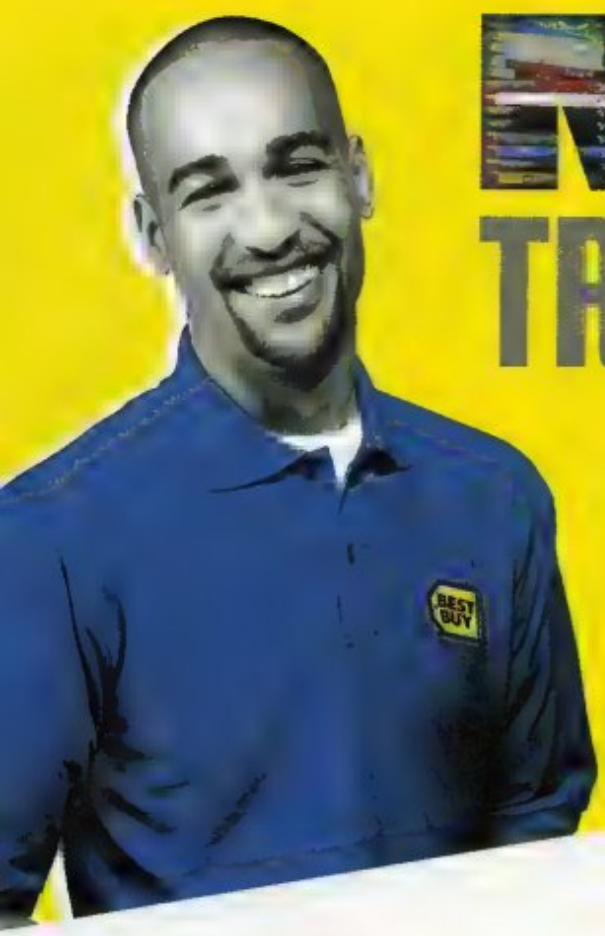
▲ The EGO engine is more than capable of some awesome particle and physics effects.

▲ Why, yes, big baddies with guns are exactly what I'm looking for.

LET'S CHILLAX

The action in Bodycount follows a fairly linear path, but it's also broken up into episodic pieces. Those chunks are then broken up by brief interludes in safehouses, where soothing music plays and you get to know the sultry-voiced operator who's been talking in your ear throughout your previous mission. She's a spicy one, purring suggestive sweet nothings in your ear as you mow down bad guys. Hey, babe...wanna go on a date to the shooting range when this is all over?

MORE TRADE-IN POWER



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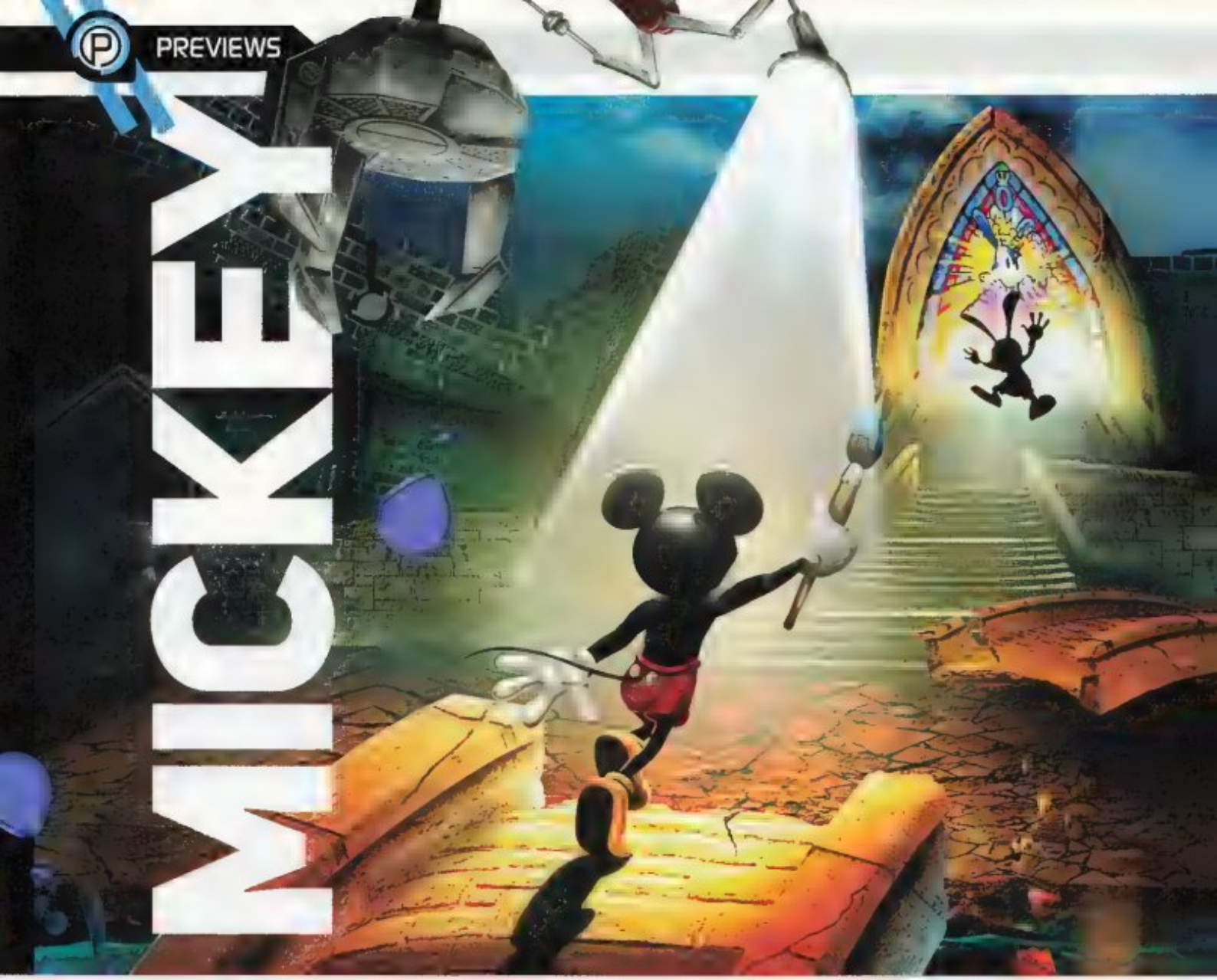
MICKEY

Disney EPIC



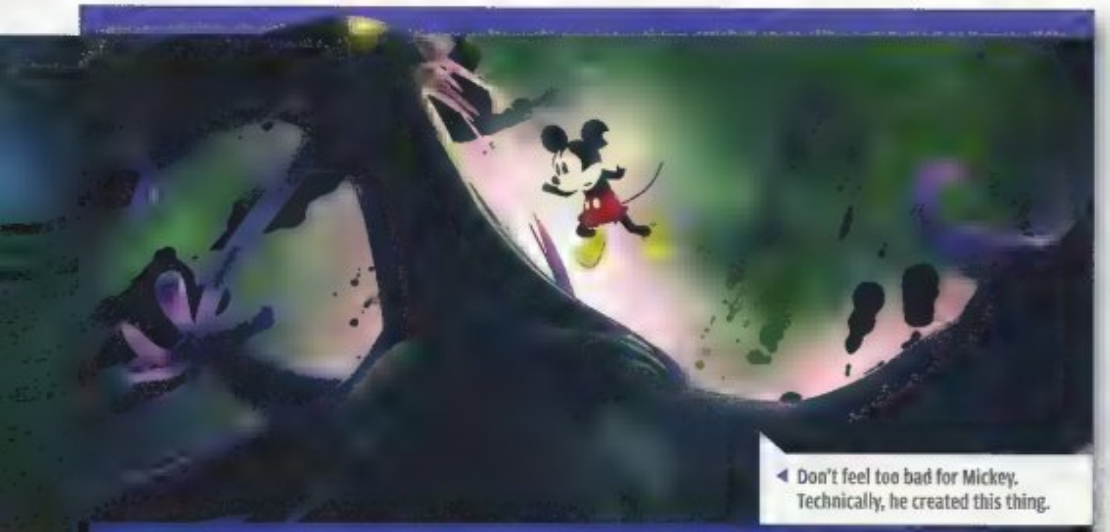
Finally, an adventure worthy of the world's most recognizable character • Words: Chris Antista

Even though Mickey's popularity spans almost a century, his cultural relevance may have dipped with the current generation of gamers. *Disney Epic Mickey* is the mischievous antidote, a reminder of why he's beloved by millions of folks who aren't in kindergarten. If you're expecting a "kiddie game," prepare for a swift kick in the posterior from a giant yellow boot. It looks as if Mickey's been playing *Super Mario Galaxy* and taking notes for this 3D platformer—he's even got a similar flick-of-the-wrist spin move good for pummeling enemies and extending jumps.

Beneath the cartoony façade lie many open-ended challenges where your choices carry unforeseeable consequences. Mickey has brought chaos upon the animated Wasteland, a place where Disney's forgotten creations once lived in peace. You help him wield the tools of the hand-drawn trade: paint and paint thinner. In a land of ink-based characters, that boils down to the power to restore life... or erase it. Nearly everything inspires interaction: Fill in new paths or remove walls to find secrets; convert enemies to friendlies or thin them out of existence; play as a hero or be a scoundrel. Just bear in mind that your actions directly impact the world in ways that won't always be immediately clear.

For instance, I got to tackle a boss battle with robot Captain Hook in two ways. One saw Mickey trading licks until the notorious pirate was forced to walk the plank, effectively disposing of him; the other involved freerunning up the ship's mast to let Pete Pan (no, that's not a typo) distract Hook, while Mickey took what he came for and left unnoticed. Which will you choose? Dunno, but you'll need to stand by it, because such decisions come with world-altering effects that cannot be undone in a single playthrough.

Disney Epic Mickey is difficult to describe really, mostly because the game is still shrouded in an air of mystery. Here's the best I came up with: It's like a *Banjo-Kazooie* RPG, based on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, if the movie were conceived and directed by Tim Burton, and then given a morality system from the guy who made *Deus Ex* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows* (that last part's actually true!). It's deliciously dark and a bit stranger than most would've expected from the lovable mouse—and that intrigues us all the more.



Don't feel too bad for Mickey. Technically, he created this thing.

THE FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF A TRUE ADVENTURER

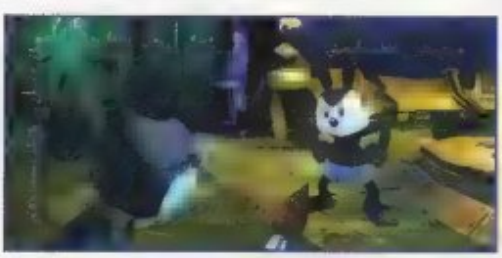
We're willing to bet the last time most gamers saw Mickey Mouse, he was emblazoned across a preschooler's backpack. But it wasn't always that way. You might be part of the first generation that has never gotten the chance to see Mickey's mischievous side. This is neither the corporate figurehead nor the iconic character teaching your children the alphabet. Disney Epic Mickey not only marks the return of the kinetic, slightly troublesome rodent the world fell in love with, but its world-bridging sidescrolling levels could be your first glimpse at Mickey's animated roots.

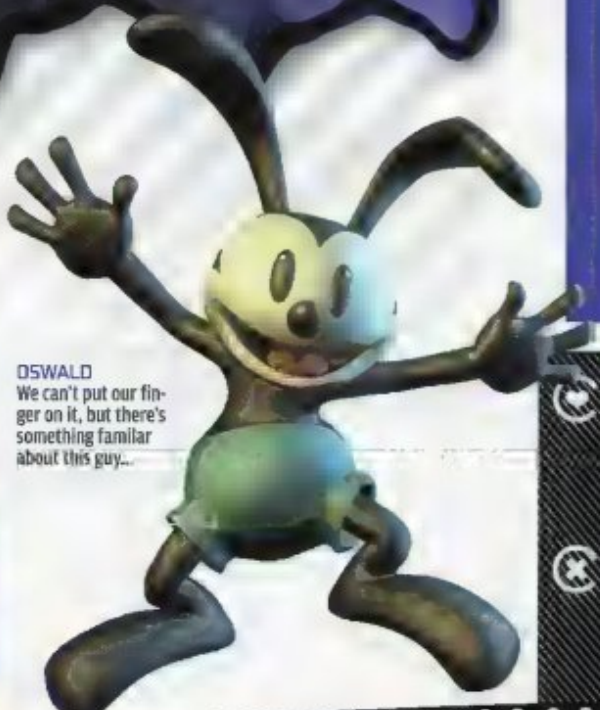
▲ Mickey's exploits used to rock the faces of theatergoers, as seen here in 1929's "Jungle Rhythm."

▲ Now his famous cartoons serve as the basis for *Epic Mickey*'s transitionary sidescrolling levels.

SIBLING RIVALRY \\

Never heard of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit? In real life he was a popular cartoon character created by Walt Disney when he worked under Universal Pictures. Creative disputes stripped the character from Walt and drove him off to start his own animation studio in 1928, as well as the almost immediate creation of a certain mouse. Almost 80 years later, Disney's regained the rights to Oswald, and Disney Epic Mickey marks his first appearance beside his long-lost "brother."





OSWALD
We can't put our finger on it, but there's something familar about this guy...

Wii

GAME DETAILS

DISNEY EPIC MICKEY

INFO
Publisher: Disney Interactive
Developer: Junction Point Studios
Platforms: Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
November 30, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Kids, Disneyphiles, and anyone who owned an N64

BEST BUY

Preorder Exclusive

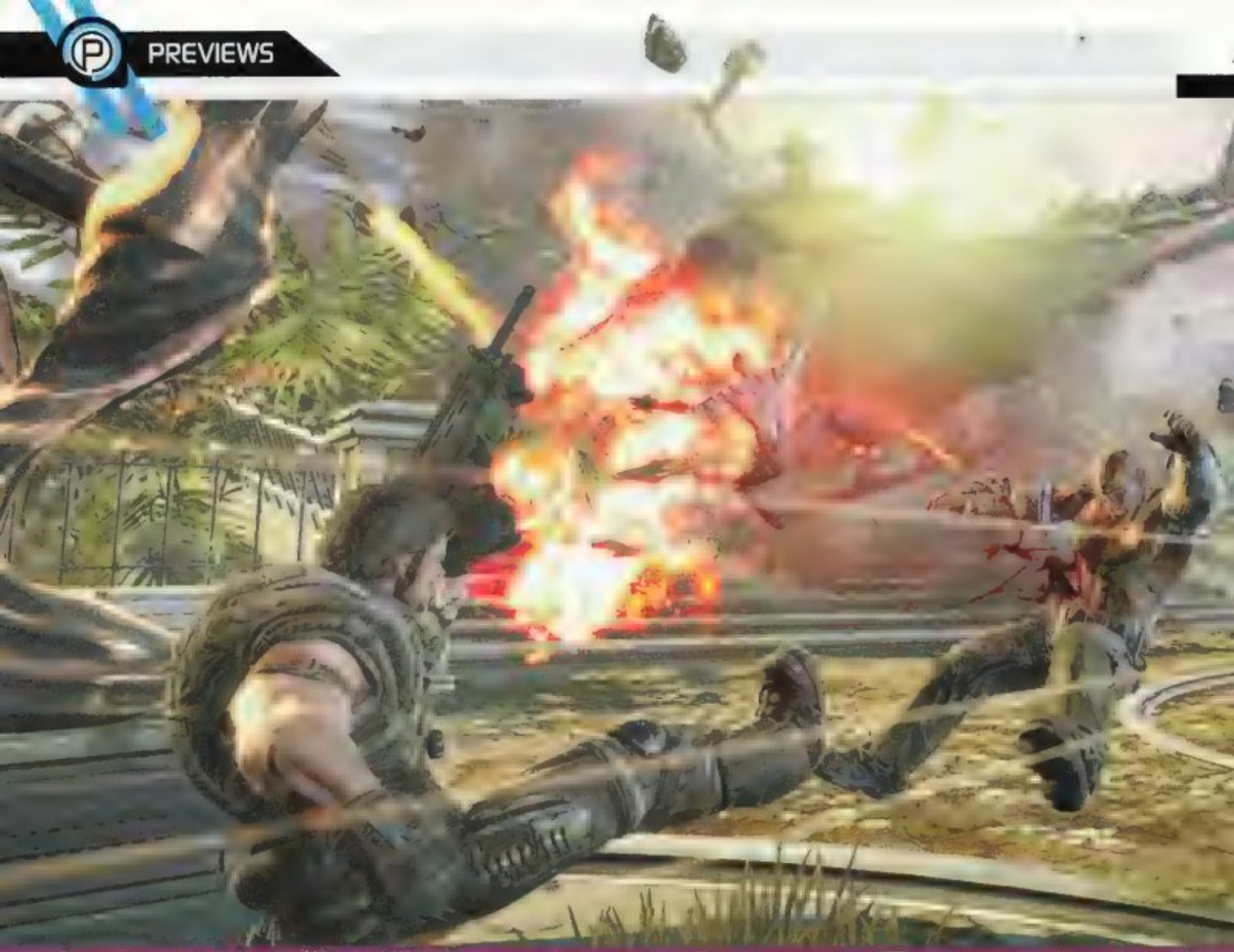
See store for details. Preorder by 12/31 receive pre-release

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

You won't find much better platform-style action than Super Mario Galaxy 2, a game that every Wii owner should have.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- The return of the classic platformer with a bizarre twist
- Oswald the Lucky Rabbit's first performance under the Disney banner in over 80 years

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Your play style could turn Mickey into a jerk, irreversibly
- Having to play the game multiple times to experience everything



BULLETSTORM

Better bring an umbrella... made of Kevlar - Words: Matt Cabral

Gears of War masterminds Epic Games and Painkiller developer People Can Fly have teamed to create an experience they claim "puts the fun back in shooters!" Based on our brief time with the aptly named Bulletstorm, they're making good on that promise. The over-the-top FPS puts you in the battle-worn boots of a space pirate who's got nothing to lose. While the premise sounds cliché, the no-holds-barred approach complements the most creative killing spree I've witnessed in a game. Bulletstorm doesn't just encourage you to slay with style, it demands it.

The basic idea is that you can earn skill points for felling foes in the most imaginative ways, yielding currency to purchase new weapons and upgrades. So, while a well-placed headshot might be satisfying to pull off, a bullet to a baddy's throat—dubbed "gag reflex"—will boost your bank account. You can also accrue coin by kicking enemies into environmental hazards; booting someone into a cactus' prickly surface or impaling them on a spiked wall is a good way to save ammo and rack up skill points.

Once you've saved up enough for that shiny new death-dealer, you'll want to hit a Drop Shop—item vendors spread throughout levels—to browse their blood-spilling selection of guns and gear. I broke the bank on the pricey but oh-so-worth-it Bouncer, a wide-barreled musket that fires cannonballs at Bulletstorm's line-up of freaks and mutants. While this screen-clearing toy is effective, I found its upgrade skill even more fun to unleash on the flesh-hungry hordes; once charged, I was able to blast off a bowling ball-like projectile that bounced around the environment, steam-rolling any sap unlucky enough to cross its path. I could also kick the pinballing ammo back at enemies, making for the deadliest game of kickball ever.

In addition to its arcadey gameplay, Bulletstorm sports an engaging story, colorful characters, screen-swallowing boss battles, and varied sci-fi inspired levels. I look forward to appreciating all aspects of its inspired design, while shooting dudes in the neck, when it hits like a hail of gunfire early next year.

AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN

The section of *Bulletstorm* we unleashed mayhem in was dubbed "Collapsed Building." Rife with crushed concrete, splintered beams, crashed columns, and walls that failed their encounter with Kool-Aid Man, it provided a perfect example of the game's detail-drenched, debris-strewn level design.

This is Sid. We suspect he may be a Terminator. Why? Oh, uh, no particular reason.

WE PROBABLY SHOULDN'T HAVE ASKED

We've seen some nasty take-outs in the *Bulletstorm* demos we've had, but we asked Lead Producer Tanya Jessen to describe one of her game's most gruesome kills. Her reply about the "Rear Entry" shot left us twisting uncomfortably in our chairs. We'll let you guess where this last shot has to go.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

BULLETSTORM

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Epic Games/ People Can Fly
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Not announced yet

GENRE
First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE
February 2011

SUITABLE FOR
FPS fans who like to kill creatively; sadists

WHIP IT GOOD

One of your more unique tools is called the "leash." This whip-like weapon reels baddies in for gruesome up-close kills and lays waste to environmental objects. Even cooler: it can be charged with a "thump" attack where you slam it into the ground and flick enemies into the air. Once the scumbags are skyward, you can then pick them off with hot lead.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Painkiller was the game that put People Can Fly on the map. It's a fun, no-holds-barred FPS ala *Doom* and *Serious Sam*. It hit Xbox, too.

THIRD BEFORE FIRST

People Can Fly originally envisioned *Bulletstorm* as a third-person shooter, but when Epic came aboard it was decided that a first-person perspective would up the visceral ante. After driving my boots into numerous enemies' swimsuit areas I agree it's a more immersive, spectacular-feeling point of view.

▲ Once a foe enters ragdoll mode the real abuse can begin. This is such an evil game.

▲ You don't actually play from this weird angled perspective. That's just the magic of PR shots!

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Endlessly inventive ways to silence creeps with style to spare
- ❤ All of the amazing graphical excess you expect from Epic
- ❤ Fun gross-out vibe

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Where are the multiplayer details?
- ✖ Violence is bad, m'kay?

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01 SOULCALIBUR IV

The fourth installment in the long-running *Soulcalibur* series, *Soulcalibur IV* offers all the great hack-n-slash action that you've come to expect from the games, with special guest appearances from several characters from the *Star Wars* universe (such as Darth Vader, Yoda, and Starkiller). Tune up your skills in the Training mode, or check out the Story, Arcade, or Museum modes. Think you can handle some fierce competition? Then test your skills online for the very first time with a *Soulcalibur* game, where you can even take your fully customized characters to battle.

02 LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4

Covering the first four books of the popular *Harry Potter* franchise, *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4* brings you into the beloved LEGO game universe that has been the home to *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars*. With an emphasis on collecting items and exploring, there's plenty of fun to be had by gamers of all ages, and there's even a split-screen multiplayer mode that lets two players adventure at the same time. Think you can unlock the mysteries of Hogwarts? Then don't pass up this simple charmer that's fun for the whole family.

03 STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

Ever wanted to take on Stormtroopers by the hundreds? Think you can cut an AT-ST in half? Does tearing a Star Destroyer out of low orbit sound like a great way to spend your afternoon? If so, you're going to get loads of enjoyment out of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*. Putting you in the boots of Darth Vader's apprentice Starkiller, you're charged with following his every whim. Keep the experience fresh when fighting over 50 different types of enemies: You can slice your way through all the opponents who try to stop you, or take a stealthier route to get around them. May the force be with you.

04 STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY

After nearly 12 years of waiting, *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty* has finally released to the world. Now that it's been critically acclaimed by just about everyone under the sun, it's your turn to fend off the impending Zerg invasion and lead Raynor's Raiders to victory on the surface of Char. Want to engage in some of the most addictive and celebrated online competition available in any game on the market? Log onto Battle.net and test your skills against the best and brightest.

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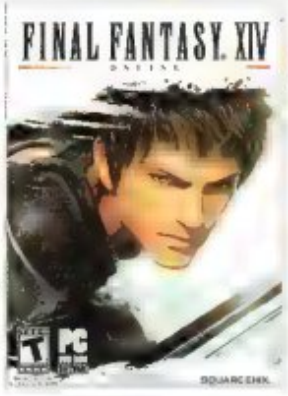

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05 FINAL FANTASY XIV

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) are a dime a dozen. But, if you're looking for one that's both a visual masterpiece and that comes from the same people in charge of the long-running, celebrated *Final Fantasy* series, you're not going to want to miss out on *Final Fantasy XIV*. After more than 14 iterations of the series, *FF14* features a brand new perspective on the world we've all come to know and love. So go on… pick up your axe, start up the immersive character creation process, and spend some gil!

06 FINAL FANTASY XIII

Face your destiny as you travel through the worlds of Cocoon and Pulse in *Final Fantasy XIII*. Discover diverse allies who will join you in your fight, contribute to your party's ever-growing Paradigms, and execute punishing attacks with their powerful weapons and magic. Become one with the enigmatic Eidolons to destroy even the most powerful of foes, and master the revamped Active Time Battle system, which gives you control over all of the action. With seamless transitions between real-time gameplay and in-game cinematics, *Final Fantasy XIII* draws you into the mystery and magic of the series like never before.

07 TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON [Wii]

When most people think *Ghost Recon*, they think of a realistic, methodical shooter that enables you to plan each mission down to the smallest detail. However, the Wii manifestation of *Ghost Recon* plays less like *Rainbow Six* and more like *Time Crisis*. You can run and gun your way—solo or in two-player co-op—through this rail shooter with MP5 blazing and radio chatter blaring. Make sure that you keep your weapon reloaded, but don't lose track of your grenade count. You're going to need each and every piece of brass to throw at countless waves of enemies!

08 TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X. 2 [Wii]

As a member of an elite squadron of fighter pilots, it's your job to pilot the world's most technologically advanced aircraft to defend freedom worldwide. After the events of the first *H.A.W.X.* game you're sent to the Middle East, where (surprise, surprise) Russian nuclear weapons have disappeared and violence is at an all-time high. You'll be given charge of three different teams of pilots: America (Hunter), British (Monroe), and Russian (Sokov). Once you've spent enough time gunning down AI pilots to save the world for another day, crank up the multiplayer mode and engage in up to four player co-op, or go head-to-head with up to eight pilots in one game.

CONDUIT 2

Aliens attack... again! • Words: Matt Liptak

Sporting sharp visuals, spot-on controls, and plenty of alien-blasting action, last year's *The Conduit* finally proved a solid first-person shooter could be pulled off on the family-friendly Wii. Not about to rest on its past success, though, developer High Voltage Software (working with Terminal Reality's Infernal Engine) is locking and loading its sequel with a slate of game-changing updates and improvements. For starters, this FPS follow-up is weaving an engaging narrative—arguably the original's weakest aspect—complemented by cinematic cut-scenes and a script fleshed out by sci-fi scribe Matt Forbeck.

While a well-spun yarn's a welcome addition, I'm more interested in splattering alien innards all over the game's pretty environments. Thankfully, *Conduit 2* will arm you with an inventive variety of fresh alien and human hardware. The Shield Gun, which collects fired bullets, grenades, and rockets and spits them back from where they came, is among my favorites. And the aptly named Invisible Gun is great for cloaking yourself from especially dangerous threats; simply fire it up, sneak behind a target, and introduce their face to the floor before they can get a shot off.

All this new stopping power won't go to waste, as *Conduit 2*'s also adding skill-taxing boss battles; one during my demo saw an enormous, tentacle-flailing sea monster go to town on an offshore drilling platform. You have to take out the beast with turret fire—normal weapons can't scratch its scaly skin—while monitoring a "structural integrity" meter and your own declining health. With both bars in the red, and the structure barely peeking above the ocean's surface, a well-placed slug finally silenced the sea-dwelling menace.

Once you've cracked the campaign's conspiracy and thwarted the extraterrestrial threat, you'll want to jump online and see how your friends fare against all that otherworldly weaponry. *Conduit 2* offers 12-player competitive play and four-player split-screen, as well as a new perks system and customizable load-outs. Whether online or local, this alien-slaying sequel promises to pack plenty seat-of-your-pants thrills.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

PACK A PASSPORT

Wii

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

CONDUIT 2

INFO
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: High Voltage Software
Platforms: Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
12 players online, 4 players split-screen

GENRE
First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE
Winter 2011

SUITABLE FOR
FPS fans who prefer to shoot things on the Wii

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you missed the first Conduit game, now would be a good time to get acquainted. If you've already played it, go back and brush up on your technique.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Across-the-board improvements, from gameplay and presentation to story and online modes

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Still a Wii exclusive, so it will never look as pretty as hardware-pushing competitors *Halo* and *Killzone*

SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

D**n it feels good to be a Shogun • Words: Matt Cabral

Released in 2000, Shogun: Total War put The Creative Assembly on the map, positioning it as a real contender in the real-time strategy space. Following a decade of honing its craft on spin-offs and refinements, it's now returning to its feudal Japan-trampling roots with Shogun 2: Total War, easily its most ambitious title to date.

Featuring many of the enhancements and refinements introduced in previous Total War entries, this turn-based strategy/real-time tactical follow-up will be familiar to most PC-playing warlords. For fans who'd rather tax their brains than thumbs, all of the expected depth is there: RPG character leveling, extensive skill trees, resource management, a morale system, 30 varied unit types, eight factions, and even a family drama metagame (see sidebar). But taking into account modern gamers' appetites for hardware-taxing conflagrations and Red Bull-fueled gaming sessions, the team's also aiming to satisfy the Bruckheimer-loving sides of our brains.

To that end, TCA is leveraging a smoking new engine to infuse battles with an effective cinematic presentation, complemented by stunning effects and animations. During my demo, I witnessed a large-scale, nighttime battle that wouldn't look out of place in a Ridley Scott epic. As thousands of cavalry (the game can handle 56,000 units on-screen simultaneously) charged a hill during a brutal rainstorm, flaming arrows lit up the sky.

With crackling flames swallowing up trees and structures on the battle's perimeter, subtle but equally cool touches began revealing themselves: Individual branches whipped in the wind, rain pooled on the battlefield, and precipitation soaked warriors' uniforms—even trickling down their faces. As my eyes settled on these sights, my ears engaged as the booming thunder gave way to the agonizing screams of fallen samurai.

Shogun 2: Total War is first and foremost a deep strategic experience, so a lot of those eye-pleasing graphical flourishes will double as potentially game-changing elements: Wet bow strings change an arrow's trajectory, while thick mud slows cavalry units.

My brief time with this promising title impressed me, but barely scratched the surface of its bottomless depth and potential. I'm already sharpening my katana in anticipation of its 2011 release.

▲ SLAY WITH STYLE The Shogun's a master of the art of war, able to cut a swath through any foe. He is less skilled at piloting boats.

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

The Creative Assembly has been waging Total War for over a decade, releasing multiple award-winning efforts following its early years working with EA Sports. Since the original *Shogun: Total War*, the studio has released *Medieval: Total War*, *Rome: Total War*, *Medieval II: Total War*, *Empire: Total War* and *Napoleon: Total War*, as well as numerous expansion packs. The developer also created the console titles *Stormrise*, *Viking: Battle for Asgard* and *Spartan: Total Warrior*.

FEUDAL FAMILY FEUD

In addition to risking your life on the battlefields of 16th-century Japan, you'll have to brave complex, potentially game-shifting family conflicts. Fueled by political motivations, deceit, and double-crosses, family politics add even more depth to the game. Tracked on an intuitive menu, relationships with siblings, ancestors' social status, and your marriage choices can open, block, or blur integral paths.

▲ BUILD AN ARMY On top of solo and competitive play, you can recruit your Japan-conquering buddies in co-op mode.

▲ TOTAL UPGRADE? The revamped engine should please graphics aficionados, but you'll need some decent hardware to run it at full tilt.

▲ SLAY WITH STYLE Battles fought by hero characters on the overworld map can be played out in cinematic cut-scenes. You can skip these mini-movies if you like.

FOR FANS WHO'D RATHER TAX THEIR BRAINS, ALL THE DEPTH IS THERE

PC

GAME DETAILS

SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

INFO
Publisher: Sega
Developer: The Creative Assembly
Platforms: PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Competitive and cooperative

GENRE
Turn-based strategy/RTS

RELEASE DATE
2011

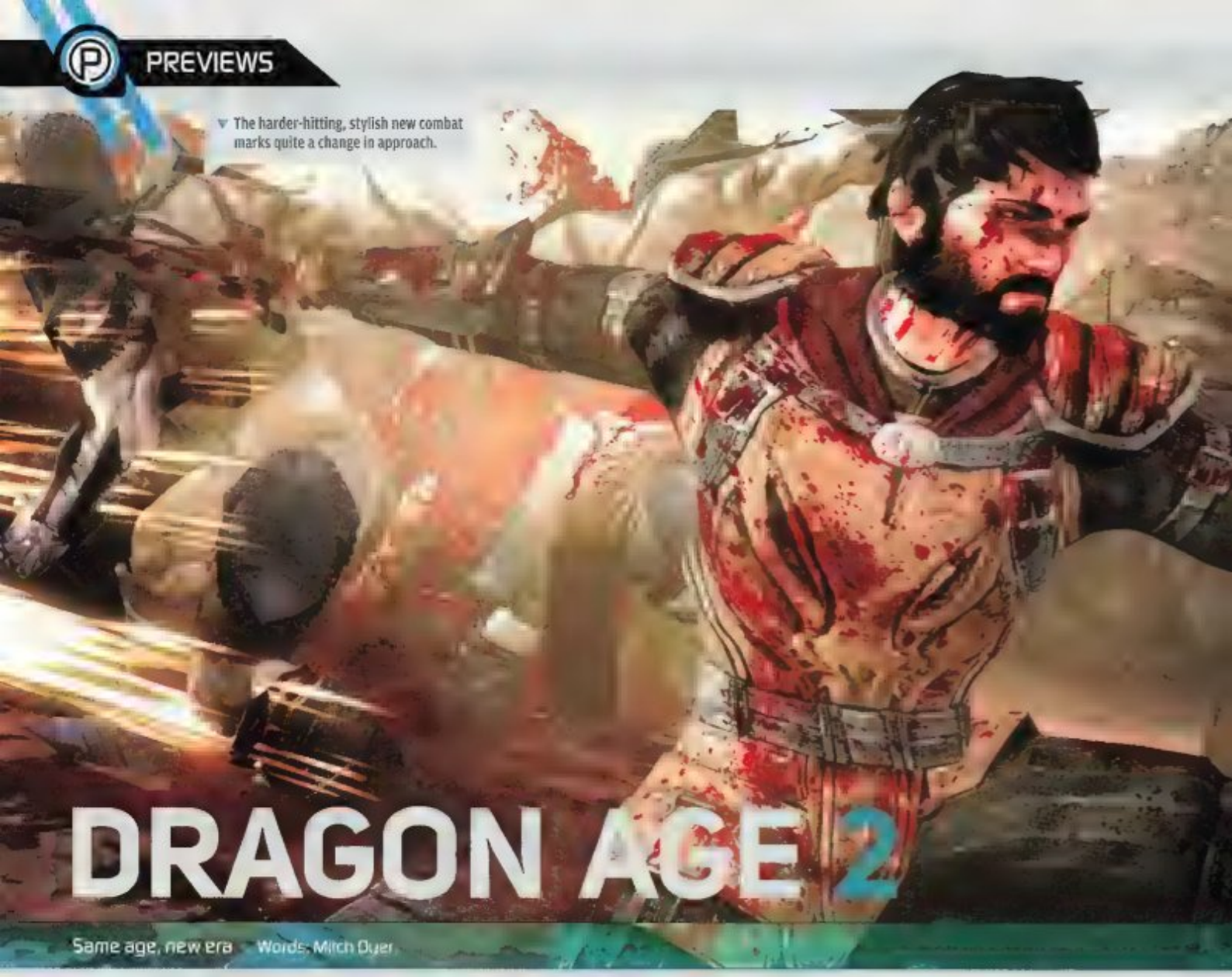
SUITABLE FOR
Armchair warlords, longtime TCA fans, historic strategy buffs

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The first Shogun came out way back in 2000. It's still a great game, and it's neat to see how much games have changed in a decade.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Endless RTS depth is complemented by improved AI
- ❤ This game's a looker, even by typical action game standards

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Although more accessible than previous *Total War* entries, the complexity may still scare off less-seasoned samurai



▼ The harder-hitting, stylish new combat marks quite a change in approach.

DRAGON AGE 2

Same age, new era — Words: Mitch Dyer

BioWare knows that *Dragon Age: Origins* had its fair share of problems on consoles. Its combat was boring, the graphics kinda gross, and it blatantly felt like a half-hearted PC port. The team's doing everything it can to right those wrongs in *Dragon Age 2*.

David Silverman, brand manager at BioWare, chimes in. "It felt like you were watching the fight in *Origins*. In *Dragon Age 2*, if you watch, you die. It's that simple." He's not messing around, either. When I finally got to check out the new combat system for myself, I had to force myself out of that bad habit.

Fighting is far more fun this time around, and as a result battles are a blast. Silverman says that *Dragon Age 2* follows the philosophy that something awesome should happen each time you push a button. It largely lives up to its ideology. The action-RPG-style combat is much more enjoyable and involved than *Dragon Age: Origins*' frequently unremarkable battles. Meanwhile, the PC version maintains (and improves) on the tactical system established in the 2009 release.

What makes it such an improvement is the way you can string your attacks and abilities together. My favorite moment? I slipped from a regular attack into a stylish spin move before backflipping out of the fight, and then capped it off by chucking a bomb into the fray. The explosion really highlighted how much BioWare's amplified the gore.

Dragon Age's varied origin stories set the stage wonderfully while exploring your identity. This is gone, replaced by a single, set-in-stone starting point. Human hero Hawke's zero-to-hero story spans 10 years, though, so I'm not terribly worried about Hawke lacking depth.

How the whole thing's conveyed is really cool, too. Silverman cites the story-within-a-story method seen in "The Usual Suspects" and "The Princess Bride" as a means to "eliminate the filler segments and focus on the best moments in Hawke's life."

Hawke's ability to speak gives you a sense of identity that a silent avatar just can't project. This, along with some subtle cinematic direction and the new dialogue selection, shows that BioWare is aligning the fantasy franchise with *Mass Effect 2*'s greatest successes.

The simple dialogue system—broken down by moods rather than lines—keeps the conversations moving in a believable way. You react rather than read, and it keeps the chit-chat interesting.

Cap it all off with immensely improved visual fidelity, more on-screen enemies, and a colossal world with deeper lore, and *Dragon Age 2* is easily one of my most anticipated sequels of the new year.

THE SIMPLE DIALOGUE SYSTEM KEEPS THE CONVERSATIONS MOVING

▼ Remember the Qunari? They have a striking new look in *Dragon Age 2*.

STEN IS A CHUMP

This huge-horned dude on the right is from the same race as Sten, the monotonous Qunari from Dragon Age: Origins...but this dude is at least 27 times cooler. His huge horns and ruthless brutality during DA2's cinematic trailer give him the edge over his ol' ally.

PS3 XBOX360 PC

GAME DETAILS

DRAGON AGE 2

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Not announced yet

GENRE
RPG

RELEASE DATE
March 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Story-loving role-playing junkies with a lust for gore

(UN)FAMILIAR FACE

BioWare gives Flemeth a fairly major makeover.

Flemeth. Most [illegible] witch of the Wilds, returns in *Dragon Age 2*, now flaunting a freaky new appearance. Her new get up is not unlike the frightening Maleficent from Disney's Sleeping Beauty, and her thin, angular look, accentuated by a new suit [illegible] a big improvement over her hag-wearing-rags outfit from the [illegible] *Dragon Age: Origins*.

Then there's a [illegible] explained change in her demeanor. We suspect her sudden role as savior, which came at the end of the game, played a [illegible]

GAMEPLAY

One thing we particularly enjoy is how enemies react in combat. When you smack a Darkspawn with your shield, they stumble. Slash 'em and they recoil. This is far better than the crummy animations in *Origins*.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

The original *Dragon Age* was great on PC, but somewhat compromised on consoles. Seek out the PC game and some key mods, if you want a hardcore role-playing experience.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Improved combat is super-exciting
- ❤ Dialogue system reflects *Mass Effect 2*'s effective simplicity
- ❤ Hawke can talk!

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ No more origin stories. Hawke is simply who he or she is, and you mold the character from there

CRYSIS 2

It's all about the Nanosuit • [illegible]

Crysis 2 leaves one island for another one. No longer content with their tropical paradise, the folks at Crytek brought *Crysis 2* to a more familiar setting: New York City. Having the game take place in a recognizible location instantly creates a connection between the player and the game's world.

The original Crysis had a lot going for it: a slew of force recon marines, a bevy of awesome weapons and an amazing piece of kit, the vaunted Nanosuit. Realizing that the Nanosuit had a ton of untapped potential, the team at Crytek upped the ante by making the suit more than just a cool piece of equipment. This time around, your Nanosuit is in many ways a character in its own right.

With that in mind @GAMER recently made the trek to Crytek's studio in Frankfurt, Germany to get some hands-on time with the game, now in its final stages of development, and meet the team behind this much-anticipated sequel.

By now most gamers are aware of the basic storyline behind *Crysis 2*. There's an alien invasion and the game's protagonist, Alcatraz, along with a select group of other force recon marines, are forced to battle between two distinct enemies, the aliens who've invaded Earth and the Cell, humanoid opponents who, like the force recon marines, are also battling the aliens.

Of course this is an oversimplification of the *Crysis 2* story. Crytek actually hired veteran sci-fi author Richard Morgan to write the storyline. According to Morgan, "storytelling is about humans." To that end he used Hurricane Katrina as somewhat of an inspiration for the story surrounding a now-devastated NYC. In a nutshell, he wanted the game, similar to the Hurricane Katrina story, to be "not just the catastrophe, but what happened afterward, including the human inability to cope with the situation." Additionally, Morgan's theory around game writing revolves around the player being forced to play catch-up. Simply put, you're dropped into a situation that's already in motion and as the game progresses you begin to figure out why the Cell is shooting at you when they should be shooting at the aliens.

Additionally, since *Crysis 2* is "all about the Nanosuit," the suit itself is in many ways also a character in the game. As the game progresses you'll come to realize that there's a mystery surrounding the suit that's not unlike the mystery surrounding Cell. As the game progresses you'll learn more about both, and may be surprised by what you learn.

THE THREE PILLARS

Crytek's CEO Cevat Yerli explained that *Crysis 2* was developed with three pillars in mind. The nanosuit is at the heart of the game and lets players express themselves in different styles. The gameplay is designed around the idea of a "choreographed sandbox" where story events unfold but you can play as you want in the "catastrophic beauty" that is a constantly transforming NYC. And lastly, sophisticated AIs react intelligently to how you fight them.

In stealth mode, you can easily sneak up on those unsuspecting enemies.

The Stomp is a move that lets you kill a number of enemies.

CTIBLE WORLDS
where you hide. The
nvironments in Crysis 2 are all
structible. So is that wall you're
behind.

▲ YOU OK, BUDDY? In Team Deathmatch, it be up to you to watch your team-mate's back.

MULTIPLAYER ARMS

The folks at Crytek UK were tasked with creating Crysis 2's multiplayer. As in single-player campaign, the Nanosuit is an integral part of the multiplayer experience. Now that it's easier to switch between the two most popular Nanosuit modes, armor and stealth, you can more easily determine if you want to compete in stealth mode, like the Predator, or armor mode, like the Terminator.

▲ The multiplayer arenas do a great job of showing off the destruction that's befallen the Big Apple.

▲ Kick enough butt in multiplayer and you'll earn air support. Take that, bad guys!

▲ Energy weapons more effectively deplete armor than ballistic weapons.

NOW IN 3D

3D gaming is all the rage, and we were stoked to get some hands-on time playing Crysis 2 in 3D. We played through several single- and multiplayer levels in the traditional format before doing the same in 3D. Playing for hours in one mode before transitioning to the other really highlights the added fun that 3D offers. Based in NYC, heights play a big part in Crysis 2. This also means that in 3D you'll experience the verticality in some new and interesting ways.

The 3D in Crysis 2 is implemented in a way that really makes a lot of sense. There's the player, then the HUD and the environment. Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli is committed to making 3D immersive and fun. According to Yerli, how companies implement 3D in games is critical in that when done wrong, the experience can cause some major eye-strain. No eye-strain was evident in Crysis 2, so they're doing something right.

GO TO PG 92

Be sure to check out our 3D Gaming How-To in the Gear section.

Fun with friends

01 GOT GUNS?
The weapons in *Crysis 2* can all be customized and tweaked in real time.

02 FIRE TEAMS
Working in teams is always fun. One can snipe while the other provides cover.

WEAPONS

Being a first-person shooter, weapons play a major role in *Crysis 2*. There are 12 primary weapons, four secondary weapons, three mounted guns, five explosives, and 11 attachments. The mounted guns are particularly exciting in that you can commandeer them and use them while you ride battle

GAME DETAILS

MATURE 17+

CRYSIS 2

HANDS-ON

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: Crytek
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Split-screen and online team deathmatch and capture the flag.

GENRE
First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2011

SUITABLE FOR
FPS fans and anyone who's ever been to New York City

TWO SETS OF ENEMIES
In *Crysis 2* you'll be forced to battle with two enemies: the alien invaders and the [illegible]

IMAGE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/13422425

GO MOBILE

We've got the lowdown on the best games to rock (or at least vibrate) your pocket • Words: Mitch Dyer

For the most part, Apple's App Store serves as a digital landfill. Impressive PSP and Nintendo DS releases have tapered off in recent months, too. And with 3DS far off in 2011 and so many incredible console games dominating the holiday silly season, it's easy to lose sight of the smaller, more portable side of our obsessive hobby.

It's hardly the end times for mobile gaming, though: Portable games are so readily accessible on so many platforms that going somewhere without games is almost impossible. Whether you're playing PopCap puzzlers on your sophisticated smart phone or PlayStation ports on your PSP, great gaming is always a pants pocket away—you've just gotta dig deep past the piles of trashy time-wasters to find the truly addictive, original titles.

Allow us to make life a little easier for you. Read on to learn of numerous outstanding mobile gaming experiences that you shouldn't skip out on, or should definitely catch up on, spread out across all the major portable platforms. Get playin'.

Taking cover is generally smart, but a few sandbags versus a tank? *Really?*

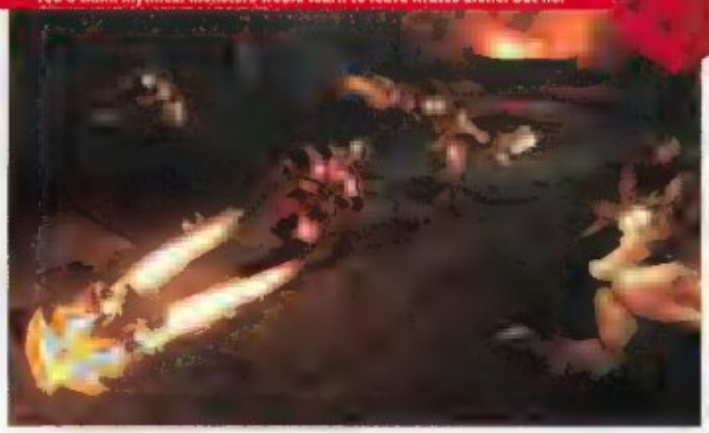
VALKYRIA CHRONICLES II

Publisher: SEGA • Developer: SEGA
Platforms: PSP

One of the most underappreciated PlayStation exclusives ever, Valkyria Chronicles' outstanding combination of turn-based strategy and real-time third-person combat created one of the most enjoyable RPG experiences in recent memory.

The PSP sequel to the amazing PS3 title doesn't pull any punches—it's as hardcore and fun as they come. That it's getting another sequel is a minor miracle—Valkyria's quickly developed a tragic tradition of selling abysmally. It's easier to get into than its hardcore reputation might make you think, so if you skipped out on this series in the past we can't recommend it enough.

You'd think mythical monsters would learn to leave Kratos alone. But no.



GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Ready at Dawn
Platforms: PSP

We thought Ready at Dawn's last *God of War* PSP title, Chains of Olympus, was the peak of the handheld's performance capabilities. Yet *Ghost of Sparta*, which takes place between the first and second PS2 titles, puts its predecessor to shame.

This gorgeous action game explores Kratos' relationship with his brother during his career as the god of war. You can expect the same sort of epic wow moments that gave the series its reputation, as well as some killer happenings in new locales—the most interesting of which is the not-so-lost city of Atlantis. Funny how games keep finding it.

Yeah, it's a windsurfing werewolf. So what? Don't judge us.

SUPER SCRIBBLENAUTS

Publisher: Warner Bros • Developer: 5th Cell
Platforms: Nintendo DS

Don't let the disappointing bits of the original sully your excitement for this wildly creative sequel. Where crummy controls and too-simple solutions to uninspired puzzles ruined the first high-potential puzzler, this follow-up enables and encourages your limitless creativity.

Platforming gives it a bit of an adventure feel, but the key mechanic remains creating objects by simply typing their names. It's a novel concept that makes for equally novel brain-teasers. Super's addition of adjectives really broadens the possibilities. The wider your vocabulary, the more solutions you'll be able to concoct in this substantially improved and fully enjoyable little game.

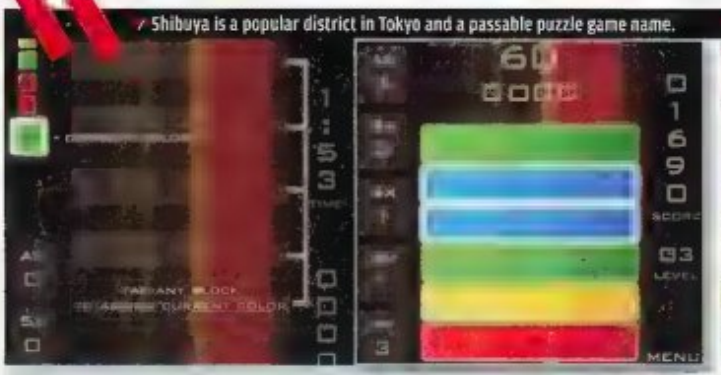
If you liked the previous *Golden Sun* games, Nintendo's got a new fix ready and waiting.

GOLDEN SUN: DARK DAWN

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Camelot
Platforms: Nintendo DS

The long-awaited sequel to one of Game Boy Advance's most beloved role-playing series, Golden Sun: Dark Dawn follows the series tradition of, well, tradition. Dark Dawn's familiar Japanese RPG combat isn't the focus; that'd be the adventure that accompanies the likable characters and memorable story.

Locating the 70-odd Djinn—which enhance your characters' magic powers, including the ability to summon big, clock-cleaning monstrosities—give its collecting a Pokémon-esque addictive quality. That should keep you busy with the dungeon crawlin' and puzzle solvin' for a good long time.



Shibuya is a popular district in Tokyo and a passable puzzle game name.

SHIBUYA

Developer: Never Center • Platforms: iPhone/iPod touch/iPad

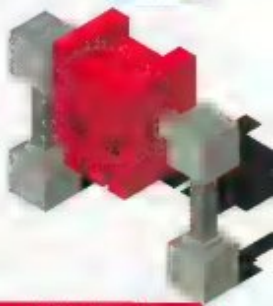
This block-droppin' puzzle game won us over with its combination of super-simple gameplay and addictive challenges. Kinda like war, Shibuya never changes: You're always stackin' blocks. But quite unlike war, Shibuya has you stacking those like-colored blocks to score points. The achievements, earned by meeting a certain score requirement or staying alive during speedy rounds, are the real winner here. We kept completing these objectives just to see the next set, which consistently improved our mad Shibuya-ing skills.

Your opponents fall into two categories: nerdy white guys and housekeeping staff.

CARCASSONNE

Developer: TheCodingMonkeys • Platforms: iPhone/iPod touch/iPad

Catan is a great starting point if you're looking to get into German board games, and Carcassonne is the next logical stepping stone. It's also arguably the better game. Your goal is to build large castles by placing tiles—big castles, big points. Strategically placing your limited human units on land or roads also fuels your victory. There's an enjoyable single-player mode, but the turn-based email multiplayer is the best reason to own this app.



It's like those bomb scenes in movies, only all the wires are black and there's a monster.

CUT THE ROPE

Developer: Chillingo • Platforms: iPhone/iPod touch/iPad

Like most addictive portable games, Cut the Rope thrives on the basic nature of its concept—feed a monster candy by cutting the rope its grub is attached to. Various physics modifiers, like balloons that shoot air, bubbles that float the sweets upward, and ropes that spawn when the candy gets near add to the increasing complexity of CtR's numerous excellent puzzles.

One of the more obtuse spitting-contest puzzles we've seen. We needed the hint book.

MONKEY ISLAND 2: SPECIAL EDITION - LECHUCK'S REVENGE

Developer: LucasArts • Platforms: iPhone/iPod touch/iPad

This beautiful remake of LucasArts' seminal point-and-click adventure game is one of the funniest, most enjoyable genre entries since, well, its original release 20 years ago. Jailbreaks, treasure hunting and loogie-spittin' competitions let you live the life of a pirate. It's slower than your usual action game, but there's plenty of humor in Monkey Island 2's bizarre conversations and puzzly predicaments. If you dig exploration and witty dialogue, this is a must-own.

Phones a go-go: CHOICES GALORE

There are many phones that are good for gaming. Which one is best for you?

HTC DROID INCREDIBLE

Manufacturer: HTC • Carrier: Verizon

Sporting the Android 2.1 operating system, an 8-megapixel camera and 8GB of internal memory, the Incredible also rocks an amazingly large screen and is super-fast. All of this makes for a great gaming experience. The only drawback is relatively weak battery life.

BLACKBERRY TORCH

Manufacturer: Blackberry • Carrier: AT&T

If you like games and your company is a Blackberry outfit you'll be pleased with the Blackberry Torch. Not as gamer-friendly as the other phones on this list, the Torch's use of the Blackberry OS 6 operating system speeds things up and gives it a pleasant user interface

Three soldiers have the latest state-of-the-art gear. The fourth has an old Boy Scout outfit.

GHOST RECON: PREDATOR

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft
Platforms: PSP

Campaign co-op in an anti-terrorist, third-person tactical shooter? *Ghost Recon: Predator* sounds a lot like a certain multiplayer-heavy Sony series, and it looks a lot like it, too. This mimicry isn't necessarily a bad thing. *Predator* may not be the best-looking PSP shooter, but it's got enough juice to sate our on-the-go desires for sniping, running-and-gunning, ordering squadmates around, and scouting with remote-controlled cars.

It's smaller, sure, but you don't lose any of the *GTA* series' appeal and challenge.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

Publisher: Rockstar • Developer: Rockstar
Platforms: DS, PSP, iPhone/iPod touch/iPad

A (relative) oldie but goodie, Chinatown Wars returns to the series' roots with an overhead point of view. Beyond that, though, this is *Grand Theft Auto* as we know it, and perhaps even at its finest. Driving, looting and assassinating transition brilliantly to the handheld arena, but it's the, ahem, addictive drug dealing that seals the deal. Criminal activity has never paid off so well as this awesome open-world action game. If only all console-to-handheld transitions went so well.

The first *Shantae* hit Game Boy Color in 2002. Just goes to show, never give up hope.

SHANTAE: RISKY'S REVENGE

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: WayForward
Platforms: Nintendo DSiWare

At $12, *Shantae: Risky's Revenge* is the most expensive DSiWare title available, but don't let that stop you from enjoying this beautiful, creative platformer. It's a dense, exciting action game with plenty to do and a lot to see. You're always exploring new areas, clobbering gigantic bosses, or trying out new abilities, such as transforming into an elephant. Yep, I liked that, too. Its multi-layered environments—you can shift between the foreground and background—give it that little extra something to make it a special game I can't get enough of.

It used to be that your car was the most expensive thing you'd wreck. Used to be...

SPLIT/SECOND

Publisher: Disney • Developer: Black Rock
Platforms: PSP

Black Rock brings its exciting action racer to PSP with this port of *Split/Second*. Set in a near-future where reality TV is dominated by exploding race tracks and super-speedy cars, this arcade-y game is for the fast-thinking daredevil opportunists. I loved it on consoles, and it translates well to PSP. Crushing my opposition with bridges, buildings, and, uh, exploding jets plunging from the heavens never fails to make me giddy.

MOTOROLA DROID X

Manufacturer: Motorola • Carrier: Verizon

Quite possibly the king of all Android phones, the Droid X rocks an enormous 4.3-inch screen, an 8-megapixel camera, records HD video and has an HDMI port! This phone is huge, but that size makes for a great gaming experience. If you're a road warrior, you may want to consider giving the Droid X a shot. Don't forget to bring a backpack.

SAMSUNG EPIC 4G

Manufacturer: Samsung • Carrier: Sprint

The Sprint version of Samsung's Galaxy S series of phones, the Epic 4G has an amazing display. Couple that with its super-fast 1GHz processor and this thing is made for gaming. While the screen isn't as big as that of the Droid X, you can easily use the Epic 4G as a mobile hotspot.

2010: THE YEAR IN GAMES

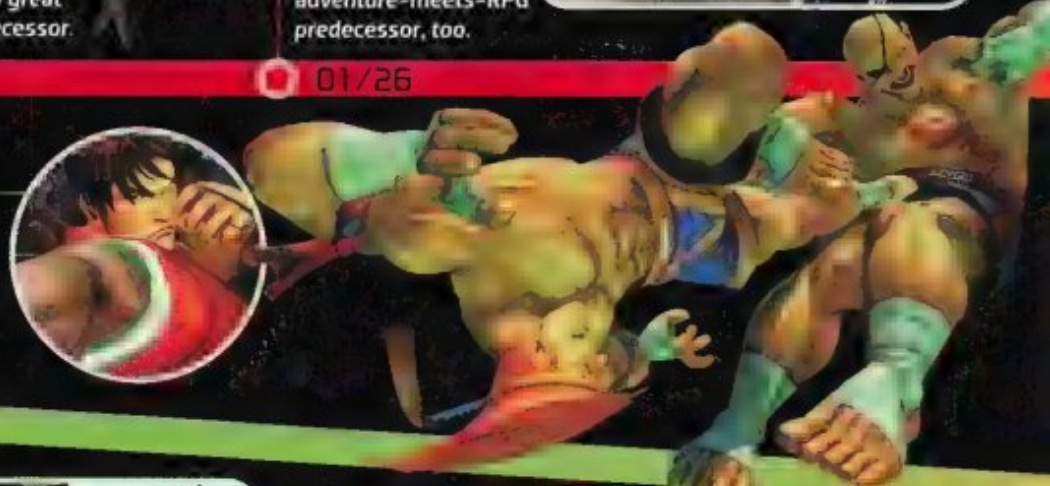
With 2010 behind us, we run down the best games of the year – [illegible]

BIOSHOCK 2 • PS3 & XBOX 360
Better in every way from the already great action adventure-meets-RPG predecessor.

JANUARY 01/05

MASS EFFECT 2 • XBOX 360 & PC
Better in every way than its great action adventure-meets-RPG predecessor, too.

01/26



SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV • PS3 & XBOX 360
The classic fighting game franchise revamped and bursting with online competitive modes and

APRIL 04/27

RED DEAD REDEMPTION • PS3 & XBOX 360
In an age of sci-fi fantasy leave it to Rockstar to look into America's violent, filthy past and revive the Western genre.

MAY 05/18

SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2 • WII
A slam-dunk on everybody's year-end list, this all-ages, intergalactic, 3D extravaganza is the poster child for maximizing all the Wii's cool potential.

05/23

You may think picking the top games of the year is a piece of cake. Not so, this year, when narrowing down a boatload of terrific titles to a handful is no easy feat. As any crusty, seasoned vet of the games industry will tell you, the best games come after a console's been around for a couple of years and developers learn to squeeze the most out of the hardware. With the Xbox 360 celebrating a fifth anniversary and Wii and PS3 now four years old, we're hitting that sweet spot right now. The drawback? Because we're well into the lifecycle of the Big Three, we're seeing lots of sequels and fewer new, original games. Fortunately, in many cases publishers are reprising franchises we can't get enough of.

None of this is to say there weren't some brilliant games on PC, DS, and in download-only form. What's more, new platforms for gaming have arrived: We'll likely be seeing contenders on Android and Apple devices soon enough. But until then, and until the next cycle of consoles drops (Xbox, er, 720, anybody?) the class of 2010 has the best and brightest games yet.

BIOSHOCK 2 • PS3, XBOX 360 & PC

Take another visit to the awesomely creepy, retro-future undersea world of Rapture, this time with multiplayer.

FEBRUARY 02/09

GOD OF WAR 3 • PS3

Kratos returns and there's just not enough blood on Olympus to slake his thirst for vengeance. Drink deep.

MAY 03/16

STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY • PC

The first in a real-time strategy trilogy of inter-species war that's light years and galaxies beyond all others.

JULY 07/27

HALO REACH: • XBOX 360
In a word? Really frickin' tremendously awesome.

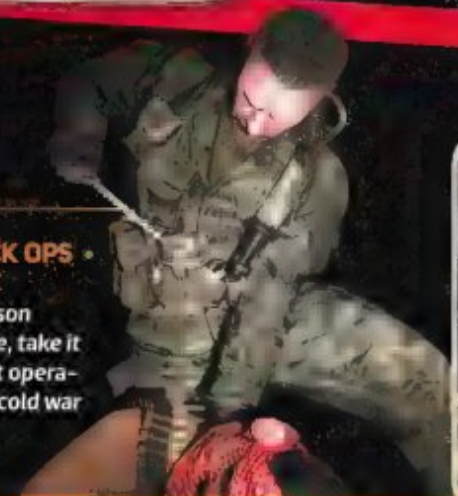
09/14

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION V • PC
Dangerously addictive turn-based strategy again lets you lead your civilization to world domination. It's friendly for newcomers and challenging for vets of the series.

09/21

FABLE III • XBOX 360
Action, morality and influence play big parts as you lead the revolution and rule Albion benignly...or tyrannically.

10/26



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS • PS3, XBOX 360 & PC
If you buy one first-person shooter this year, please, take it underground as a covert operative in this super-deep, cold war masterpiece.

NOVEMBER 11/09

PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE UNWOUND FUTURE • DS

Literally hundreds of mind-bending puzzles are cleverly woven into the continuing adventures of the Prof. and his young sidekick, Luke.

SEPTEMBER 09/12

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS • PS3, XBOX 360 & PC

The funny, post-apocalyptic Fallout world, plus sin, gambling, and lots more action.

OCTOBER 10/19

ROCK BAND 3 • PS3, XBOX 360 & Wii

Just when you thought music game innovation was tapped out, along comes Rock Band 3 with amazing new peripherals including a keyboard/keytar and a REAL GUITAR from Fender. Stay of execution granted.

10/26

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT • PS3, XBOX 360, Wii & PC

Mixes equal parts VROOM, ZOOM and BOOM.

11/16

▼ @GAMER's Andy "Francis" Salisbury knows how to move the crowd.

KINECT

Microsoft's newest peripheral delivers on all its motion-control promises • Words: Andy Corry and [illegible]

You are the controller. I'd heard this tagline about a thousand times in the months since Kinect's big reveal, and had grown accustomed to what I perceived as hyperbole. That was, until I had the opportunity to actually get some time with Kinect. As it turns out, those four words effectively sum up the experience of using Microsoft's half-billion dollar baby (that's the rumored amount that the company planned to spend marketing the product's launch).

I never suspected that I'd think of a Wii Remote as restricting, but that's changed after using Kinect to play games and control my Xbox 360. Holding up my hand to select an item on my dashboard or just throwing a punch in the air during a virtual boxing match is a notably better experience than pointing a Remote directly at the screen or flailing a Remote so intensely that I put my television at risk.

It's difficult to deny Kinect's "cool" factor, but latency is always going to be a big question when using a peripheral that tracks your movements. Curiously, there's no one answer with Kinect. On the Xbox Dashboard there's almost no lag; where you move your hand is what's selected, with little hesitation (any delay comes from the user interface's design, not lag). However, certain games, such as Kinectimals and Kinect Joy Ride, have a very noticeable drop in response time between your physical and on-screen movement. It's an annoying issue, but given that it only happens in-game, I'm willing to chalk it up to a software issue, rather than the hardware.

Kinect is without a doubt the most sophisticated motion-tracking device I've ever used. It effectively tracks everything from your head all the way down to your toes. But, all these motion-tracking good times come at a cost—space. If you're like me and live in an apartment, or just don't have a big living room, you'll run into some issues. Regrettably, if you want everything to function as intended it requires that you have at least six feet of open space in front of your TV. Still, it's a great piece of technology that acts as an impressive leap forward in the world of motion-controlled gaming.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ Excellent motion tracking
- ❤ Not holding anything is a genuine game-changer
- ❤ Facial recognition is a nice touch

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ Varied amount of lag
- ✖ Requires a massive amount of space to properly operate

OVERALL RATING:

4.75/5

KINECT ADVENTURES

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios • Developer: Good Science Studio
Multiplayer: 1-2 players local and online

Kinect Adventures packs a slew of minigames that lets you ride a raft down some of the most treacherous rapids I've ever seen, pop bubbles in outer space, and everything in between. And like many other Kinect titles, it'll take compromising snapshots of you while you duck, jump, and stretch your way through challenges.

Most of the included minigames are a lot of fun, but adding a second player is the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. This added variable makes generally enjoyable games confusing, especially if you're not well-versed with Kinect's effective range.

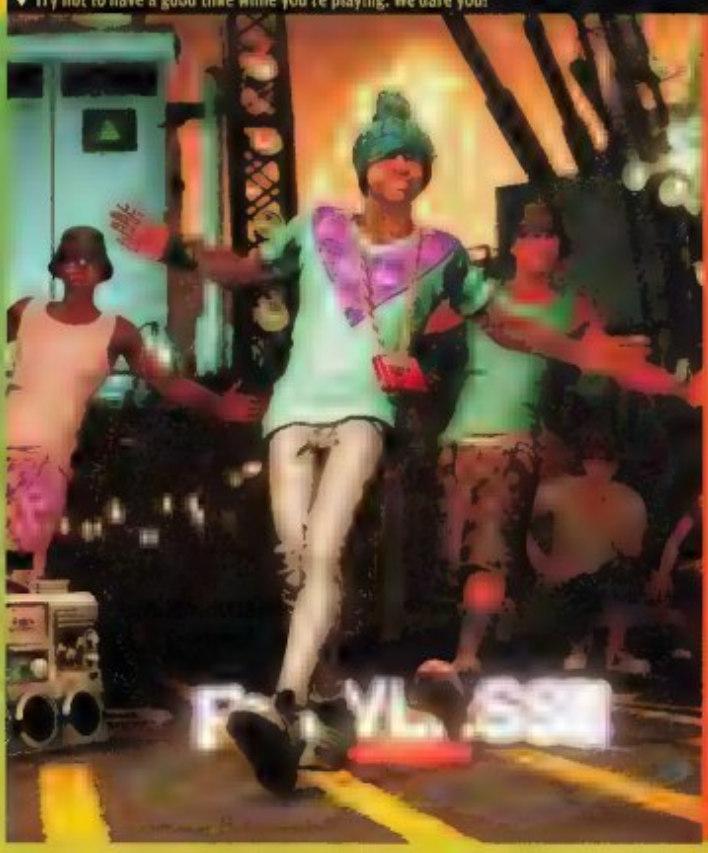
WHAT'S GREAT
- ❤ Excellent response time
- ❤ Minigames don't suck

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT
- ✖ Confusing two-player controls

OVERALL RATING

4/5

▼ Try not to have a good time while you're playing. We dare you!



DANCE CENTRAL

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios • Developer: Good Science Studio
Multiplayer: 1-2 players local and online

Of all the titles to release with the Kinect, Dance Central is without a doubt the one with the most staying power. With gameplay that can only be described as a dignified marriage of Dance Dance Revolution and Rock Band, its dance moves are easily grasped, and the gameplay is as addictive as it gets.

Thanks to a launch catalog of songs that range all the way back to Salt-n-Pepa's "Push It," there's bound to be something for everyone to enjoy. Plus, with Harmonix's track record of DLC, you'll no doubt have plenty of opportunities to snag the songs you really want to get down to.

Adding Dance Central to your Kinect collection on day one will arm you with one of the best solo and multiplayer games available on Microsoft's newfangled device.

- ❤ Tons of great songs
- ❤ Fun multiplayer

- ✖ It's physically exhausting

4/5

▼ The built-in soccer game is far from authentic, but it's extremely fun!

▼ Track and field stars of the world, prepare to be marginalized.

KINECT SPORTS

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios • Developer: Rare
Multiplayer: 2 player co-op, 1-4 players local

Kinect Sports is one of the most predictable releases of the Kinect launch, but like the happy people on the box, you'll genuinely have a blast with it. It features soccer, bowling, beach volleyball, boxing, table tennis, and track and field. Each game's controls are intuitive, and getting the hang of them is extremely easy.

To get the inevitable comparison out of the way: Yes, Kinect Sports is, pound for pound, better than Wii Sports (with the exception of bowling). Kinect Sports's bowling minigame is just plain bad, but in every other instance the minigames are more fun than their Wii counterparts.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Tons of great minigames
- Takes full advantage of the Kinect's motion tracking

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Bowling minigame is just bad

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

▼ Pay attention to the little blue person, he'll teach you what you need to know.

SONIC FREE RIDERS

Publisher: SEGA • Developer: Sonic Team
Multiplayer: up to 4 players online

Sonic Free Riders is one of the best racing experiences available for the Kinect's launch. It's by no means a perfect one, but it's got an awful lot going for it and has plenty to offer to folks who want to pretend they're blazing around on a Marty McFly–style hoverboard.

The controls are absurdly difficult to master. More often than not, turning required me to be a practicing contortionist. Still, it will eventually calibrate to your range of motion. Despite these initial frustrations, the varied courses and fun power modes make this a solid choice.

OVERALL RATING: 3.75

▼ Yeah, you can fire rockets, but good luck hitting anyone!

KINECT JOY RIDE

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Big Park
Multiplayer: Up to 4 players local; up to 8 players online

Racing games require precise controls. And while a standard controller makes delicate turns a possibility, holding your arms out in front of you as if you're gripping a steering wheel doesn't. The Kinect doesn't lag much, but the small amount present here makes the racing action difficult.

On top of the present latency, the game's tracking is inferior to other titles that employ steering mechanics. Combine that with zero control over your own speed and you've got a game that's meant only for those dying for a racer.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

▼ Not required: platinum blonde hair (but we're not going to stop you).

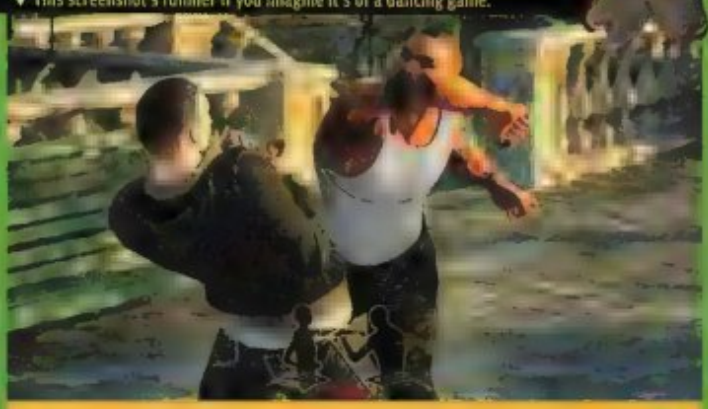
DANCEMASTERS

Publisher: Konami • Developer: Konami
Multiplayer: Up to 2 players local; up to 4 players online

Konami knows a little somethin'-somethin' about dance games, so I'm surprised that DanceMasters wasn't called *Dance Dance Revolution: Kinect Edition*. It's a diverse dance game, and one that's highly forgiving in that it seems to mostly track your movements at certain moments ("ripples") or across individual moves ("streams"). It's hard to get AAA (the highest score) on a routine sight unseen, so be prepared to keep trying. Best feature? Overlaying a facemask on your onscreen persona, such as a cowboy hat or pumpkin head.

OVERALL RATING: 4

▼ This screenshot's funnier if you imagine it's of a dancing game.



FIGHTERS UNCAGED

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: AMA Studios
Multiplayer: Single-player only

Ubisoft delivers a Punch Out!!-like brawler, requiring you to figure out opponents' weaknesses rather then just outslugging them. Score enough across a "league" and you'll unlock new adversaries. Extensive tutorials familiarize you with all of the moves—including the super attack that's triggered by a yell or other vocalization—but I was unable to unleash some moves during matches. *Fighters Uncaged* is challenging, but it's also tedious when you have to take on the same foe over and over so you can earn enough points to move on, which tempers its appeal.

OVERALL RATING: 3.25

▼ Just don't neglect your real pets.

KINECTIMALS

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Frontier Developments
Multiplayer: 1-4 players local
ESRB: Everyone

Kinectimals is a lot more than a virtual pet. In fact, its primary focus is a complete story mode that permits you to explore a surprisingly expansive island with your feline companion in tow. It's best suited for the younger gamers in your life, but still provides a lot of fun for the older crowd, too.

OVERALL RATING: 4

▼ Football is a highlight... on the box.

MOTIONSPORTS

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Milan
Multiplayer: 1-4 players local
ESRB: Teen

Judging by the box, *MotionSports* is trying to present itself as a prettier version of *Kinect Sports*. The graphics are notably better, but that's about all it has going for it. If you're looking for a sporting experience, spend your time with *Kinect Sports*. You'll get better games out of the experience, and you'll actually want to play it a second time.

OVERALL RATING: 2.75

▼ Prepare to move like a robot!

YOUR SHAPE: FITNESS EVOLVED

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Multiplayer: 1-4 players local
ESRB: Everyone

If you plan on getting a home workout with the assistance of *Your Shape: Fitness Evolved*, make sure you've got a sizeable play area. If you don't have the required amount of space, the game is almost unplayable. The built-in minigames are a lot of fun, but the personal training requires you to be unbelievably precise.

OVERALL RATING: 3

▼ Is a dragon really a misfit? Really?

ADRENALIN MISFITS

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Multiplayer: 1-2 players local
ESRB: Everyone

Adrenalin Misfits goes beyond a typical snowboarding game by offering "crossboard" riding on different surfaces; you'll also skim across water and glide through the air, for instance. Its controls are simple, though there were times when I couldn't level out after a jump or trick. The gameplay and varied activities make *Adrenalin Misfits* fun more often than not.

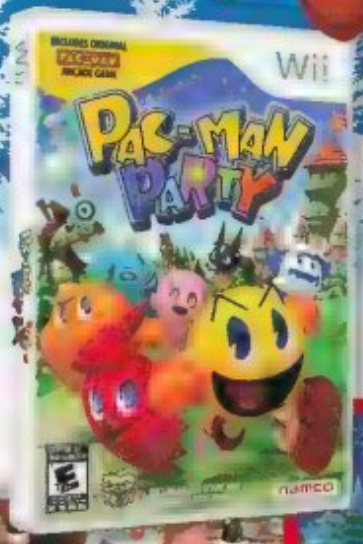
OVERALL RATING: 3.5

Play the original arcade classics: PAC-MAN DIG DUG GALAGA

Over 50 fun mini-games!

It's Time For a PAC-PARTY!

Frantic multi-player action!



PAC-MAN 30TH ANNIVERSARY

EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Cartoon Violence

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Wii namco

TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section. If you don't see it here, it's probably not worth getting.

- An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.
- A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.
- An excellent game that we strongly recommend.
- A near-perfect gaming experience.

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CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

Wil O'Neal

Wil was so excited for *Def Jam Rapstar*. Imag-

only to have to routinely

Chuck Osborn

When Group Editor in Chief Chuck Osborn isn't

he's...you know what?

Andy Salisbury

"Francis" is like our in-house Clydesdale.

a lineBacker (he is), but

Jillian Pierce

We like to mix it up here at *@GAMER*, which is

watercolors long

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Explore the wasteland in this epic sequel.

64 **ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD**
Ezio returns to save Rome and stab marks.

67 **WWE SMACKDOWN vs. RAW 2011**
Big sweaty guys in tights? Sign us up!

68 **CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS**
Could *Black Ops* save this series?

71 **GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA**
Killing baddies on the PSP is always fun.

72 **NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT**
Fast cars. Angry cops. What's not to like?

74 **JAMES BOND 007: BLOOD STONE**
We like our Bond games shaken, not stirred, and with Daniel Craig.

76 **STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED II**
Starkiller is back with new force powers.

78 **DEF JAM RAPSTAR**
The hip-hop genre finally gets a game with cred.

82 **FABLE III**
Benevolent dictators urged to apply.

84 **DJ HERO 2**
On the wheels of plastic.

86 **PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2011**
FIFA may be king, but *PES* is no slouch.

MINI REVIEWS

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88 Samurai Warriors 3
88 Pokémon Ranger: GS
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89 Sims 3: Late Night

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

There's a radioactive rattlesnake in my boot! – Words: Jillian Pierce

If you find dilapidated buildings, mutated wildlife, and a perverse view of survival in a world worth meddling with, then it's time to set up shop with *Fallout: New Vegas*. After all, there's nothing more inviting then the dismal vision of a nuclear-ravaged world.

Post-apocalyptic and RPG-shooter fans have been waiting for another new installment of the *Fallout* series since it was revived a few years ago with *Fallout 3*. Though you are welcomed by a familiar wasteland setting, this new adventure is a far cry from the coming-of-age story we saw in its predecessor. Staged on the west coast, it's an entirely different story arc where your talent as a courier lands you in the unfortunate state of being shot in the face and robbed by Benny, a well-dressed gangster. Needless to say, *New Vegas* puts the taste of revenge in your mouth early. Luckily you're found, patched up, and released into the world to track the rube down and recover the stolen platinum chip you were delivering. Unfortunately for you, he also took your memory of where you were delivering it to, what the platinum chip might be for, and why it's worth shooting someone in the head over. These are a few things you set out to discover while you help, destroy, or help destroy wasteland residents and *New Vegas* riffraff.

Obsidian, a developer with roots in the old *Fallout* games, incorporated a few familiar enemies, Perks, and factions from *Fallout 2* into *New Vegas*. The highly organized NCR (Northern California Republic) returns as the land's police force, striving to restore government to the people. They also brought back Traits, quirks that both help and hinder your character, and the ability to establish different reputations in various towns. Completely random tip: Don't let the townsfolk see you eating mutant flesh, as that crime against nature could tarnish your good name.

There are a number of well thought-out features to *New Vegas* that make surviving more realistic. The ability to craft has improved, most notably the ability to "live off of the land." Various plants, scrap metal, and even spent bullet casings serve new purposes, and could save your life later on. Enemies are more realistically equipped and drop items that match their station. And unless your strength stat is Herculean, you just might find loot weight to be a challenge to manage.

While exploring the world you'll notice the Mojave Wasteland's low population. While you'll run into various factions that will either work for or against you, thanks to the NCR it seems that your character faces more creatures and cacti than bandits and raiders. As you get closer to the beacon of New Vegas that statistic changes as you rub elbows with drunks, sex workers, Rat Pack types, and employed entertainment. This small detail allows for a more realistic scenario of life after the apocalypse. There will be opportunities to recruit a companion—or just a bodyguard—but they will depend on your reputation, Speech skill, or bottle cap reserves.

Fallout: New Vegas is a fantastically immersive and morally ambiguous game. It challenges you to be thoughtful in your character development and ultimately decide who you are in the game. Your choices, whether they are good or malicious, will affect your experience in *New Vegas*. Choose wisely.

WIL SAYS:

When ghouls become a nuisance in the wasteland, you're asked to "take care of them" in exchange for some information. Before you become intent on cleaning house, listen to what crazy objective the ghouls have for you.

◀ *New Vegas*' environments stay true to the style of the Old West.

GAMEPLAY

A huge advantage to weapons in New Vegas is the opportunity to pick up variations of standard ammunition, such as hollow points and armor-piercing rounds. With the help of your Pip-Boy you can also attach sniper scopes, silencers, and other modifications to weaponry, making your guns more effective. If your gun breaks or you run out of ammo, the Mojave Wasteland has you covered. Scattered throughout *New Vegas* are a variety of melee weapons. Stronger characters can use improvised weapons such as car bumpers or a rebar club. Overall, the melee system has been significantly upgraded.

THE NEON PARADISE

Making it to New Vegas isn't all it's cracked up to be. Its crumbling infrastructure is inhabited by ruffians and average townsfolk alike—nothing you haven't seen before. The Strip is where all the action is. Unfortunately, it is heavily guarded, and without a passport or approved credit check it's pretty much off limits. Unless, that is, you're willing to rumble with some serious Securitrons. Once inside, the atmosphere is what you'd expect of 1950's Sin City. Loose characters, "cool cat" slang, and Sinatra playing in the background give the Strip a different feel then the rest of New Vegas.

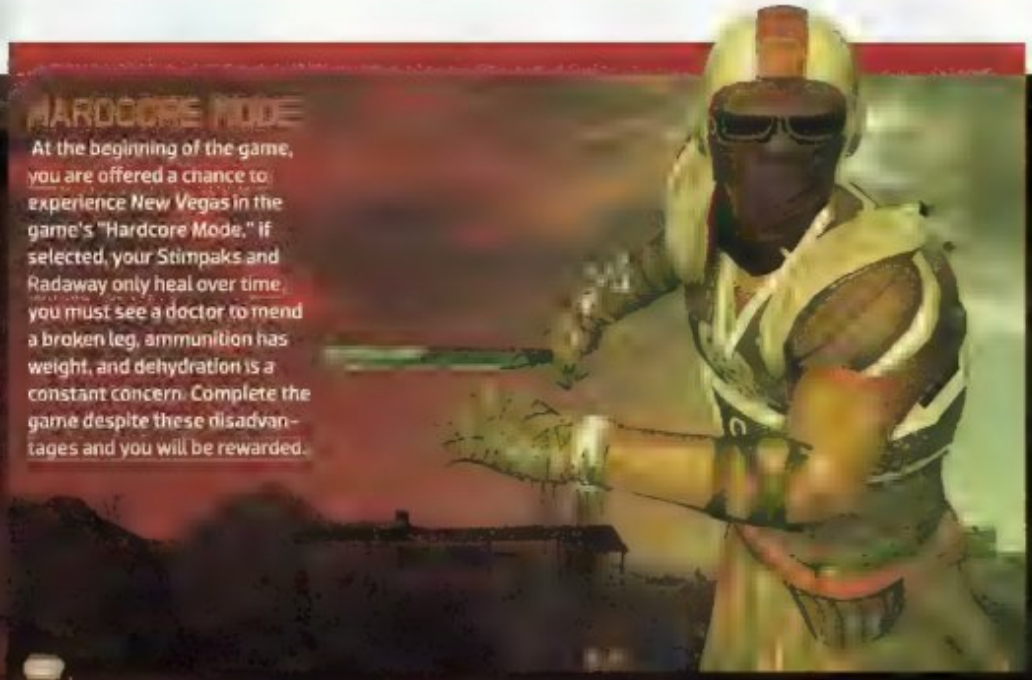
Fallout: New Vegas continues the series tradition of collectables as your character explores new towns. Among the hoardables is a Dino stuffed animal that mimics this large statue.

CHIP OUTTA LUCK

Burn his face, or ridiculous jackets.

HARDCORE MODE

At the beginning of the game, you are offered a chance to experience *New Vegas* in the game's "Hardcore Mode." If selected, your Stimpaks and Radaway only heal over time, you must see a doctor to mend a broken leg, ammunition has weight, and dehydration is a constant concern. Complete the game despite these disadvantages and you will be rewarded.



THE ATMOSPHERE IS WHAT YOU'D EXPECT OF 1950'S SIN CITY

**MAKING FRIENDS ** The companion system has been completely overhauled since *Fallout 3*. Your character's charisma score now determines how hard and how effectively a companion will fight for you. It's good to have friends, even if you have to pay to keep 'em around.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

INFO
Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Obsidian
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

RELEASE DATE
October 19th, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Lovers of intense role-playing games and *Fallout 3*

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fancy Lad Snack Cakes
- ❤ A new sky and plants makes the world feel less brown
- ❤ New Traits, Skills, and Perks to keep you entertained

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The Soundtrack is not as strong as *Fallout 3*
- ✖ Giant mutant ants aren't the only bugs you'll find in this game

AGamer
- Rich story
- Character development
- Weapon mods

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

▼ Done right, Ezio's executions are like a bloody ballet routine.

ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD

Renovating Italy one blade at a time... • Words: Andy Eddy

At the start of Assassin's Creed Brotherhood, Ezio Auditore is leading a much calmer life, without conflict. If you think that makes for a boring game, Ubisoft agrees, so it's not long before cannonballs are flying (at Ezio and his city) and enemies are delivering conspiratorial speeches.

The result is that Desmond Miles again jumps into the past to help Ezio take on his enemies, the Borgia clan. The basic gameplay will be comfortable to anyone who's played either of the first two games, with much of Assassin's Creed II serving as the foundation for Brotherhood's action. You still guide Ezio through cities, scaling buildings, and attacking his enemies as the main story path, as well as taking on side quests, discovering treasure, finding more Subject 16 markings (and subsequent puzzles), and renovating the town's boarded-up storefronts and landmarks. In the end it's all pretty familiar-feeling, but still exciting and thoroughly entertaining.

There's also a fresh series of tasks to accomplish. Your main objectives are to burn down the Borgia towers, which "lock" sections of the city. When you find a tower, you need to work your way in via stealthy movements and by thinning the ranks of enemy guards protecting the section's commander. If you're too careless, he'll escape and you'll have to wait for a "reset." Kill him and you can scale the tower for some community-building arson.

BROTHERHOOD HAS ME HOPING THAT UBISOFT WILL KEEP CHURNING OUT NEW AC GAMES LIKE THIS

The climbing mechanics have been further polished, plus the game makers made it a bit harder to find the right path to the top, so it's not a vertical cakewalk. Money you've earned enables you to reopen shops, which in turn help you get better armor and weapons, treasure maps, and art. Opening banks provides a constant trickle of cash back into your pockets.

THE ANATOMY OF ASSASSINATION

01 BAGMAN
Just when you think Ezio will be climbing up the side of the building, he floats in on a gigantic shopping bag.

02 DEAD GUY
It's easy being the victim, but far from pleasant having a not-so-secret blade thrust into your face.

03 BRUCE LEE
Okay, just kidding about Bruce...but it seems unfair to expect your killer to be in a robe, then—BANG—ninja outfit.

You'll never lack something to do, and the addition of multiplayer modes provides nicely designed matches in which to compete.

Further replay value comes from trying to get Desmond 100% "synchronized" with each of Ezio's memories, and it's not easy if there's an added objective. For instance, one goal limits you to only killing the Borgia commander, so you can't mindlessly go all stabby when you're confronted.

Ubisoft has done a great job honing the gameplay—and the tech that enables it all—so Brotherhood suffers from few of the glitches or lags that weakened the first two games. There's occasional tedium, but you can ditch most of that in favor of digging deeper into the story. Brotherhood has me hoping that Ubisoft will keep churning out new AC games like this.

HE STILL KILLS THE LADIES...

...but not with his knife. Sure, Ezio's a little older in this adventure, but he still knows how to charm the women—and he doesn't let his missions get in the way of the occasional risque romp. In fact, in one cut-scene Ezio doesn't seem confident chatting up a lady. Turns out that a good ice breaker is breaking a bad guy's face!

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8 players in four different modes–individual/free-for-all, team and co-op

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
November 16, 2010, for PS3/Xbox 360; Q1 2011 for PC

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who can run and stab without tripping

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The campaign is loaded with juicy moments of tension and suspense
- ❤ You can mark the map with places you want to return to
- ❤ The ability to replay single memories to try for 100%

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ There's a lot of sameness if you've played the previous *Assassin's Creed* games (though it is still fun)

- Assassinate friends
- Nice slice
- Climb-ania

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

MULTIPLAYER
Killing your friends for fun and profit

As noted, Brotherhood introduces multiplayer to the series for the first time, and while there was a fear that such an addition would cut into the single-player portion, it doesn't appear to be touched as there's plenty to do in the campaign to keep you busy. And the designers didn't just throw in the standard deathmatch concept for the sake of adding multiplayer, as some past games have done.

Our most fun [illegible] the assassin [illegible] you as a target. You always [illegible] the hunter and the hunted, so you have to look over your shoulder at all times. As in hunting, you have to track your prey, [illegible] roving to stay relatively hidden and keeping your target unaware of who will strike.

Over the [illegible] games earn you XP, which increases your rank and grants you benefits [illegible] of your abilities.

"YOU ARE NOT ALONE..."

While Ezio may be the HAIC (Head Assassin In Charge), he has backup. If battling the Borgia gets to be too much, you can summon other assassins to do your bidding. Be sure to continually send them on contract missions to boost their experience points and earn you some lira.

WHI[illegible]

Though AC Brotherhood isn't a wholly original concept, it still makes a nice evolution with the addition of multiplayer. Whether it'll pull players away from Call of Duty and Halo remains to be seen.

▼ This pic won Bronze in the 2010 Awkward Screenshot Olympics.

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2011

Flimsy tables everywhere quake with fear • Words: Andy Salisbury

◀ **Save a Life**
Oh no, some dude just passed out. Administer CPR!

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw has been the definitive virtual wrestling game for years, no doubt thanks to its slobber-knocking, bloodletting, table-smashing formula. Thankfully, WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011 doesn't change that winning recipe, and instead adds a heap of new features to make it even better.

The new WWE Universe Mode is without a doubt the biggest addition to WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011. Replacing the old Career Mode, it improves on the system and keeps a constant tally of every single match you play. Based off of your match history, you'll build rivalries, alliances, and even create championship-match opportunities. The roster of more than 70 Superstars and Divas provides a constantly changing ecosystem of wrestling animosity—that's plenty of people for you to suplex through tables.

However, at times the game can be a conundrum. While most matches end after you've pinned your opponent, some in the Road to WrestleMania Mode force you to fulfill additional aggravating requirements. One such match required me to use both of my characters to do a finisher on my main rival in a two-on-three match. The problem? The main character never got tagged in. In addition, it's extremely easy for AI opponents to sway the match's momentum in their favor with only a couple moves.

Despite the notable flaws, WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011 is a worthy wrestling game. If you're looking to log some solid hours of virtual wrestling entertainment, check this one out.

RASSLER WORKSHOP

If the 70 characters included in WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011 aren't enough for you, crank up the Create-a-Superstar Mode. With the addition of tons of new parts to choose from and improvements to the tattoo system, you can create a character that's all you, from the hairstyle all the way down to the finishing move. First person to make an accurate Wil O'Neal superstar wins... well, nothing except our thanks.

WIL SAYS:

The different gameplay modes in WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2011 will keep you busy for some time. Perhaps the most fun, though, is the versatile Story Designer.

PS3 XBOX360 Wii PS2 PSP

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2011

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PSP

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
4 players locally or 12 players online

GENRE
Wrestling

RELEASE DATE
October 26, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Men (and women) in tights

WHAT'S GREAT
- Fun story mode
- Lots of unlockable characters
- Entertaining Create-a-Superstar Mode

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT
- Obnoxious win conditions
- Perplexing AI
- Third-person camera used when backstage in Road to WrestleMania is nauseating

- Bodyslams
- Michael Cole!
- More divas

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

GAME OF THE MONTH!

EPIC GAMING ▸
Lovers of this epic shooter franchise won't be dissapointed in the latest in the Call of Duty series.

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

Treyarch—the studio responsible for Call of Duty 3 and World at War—has taken flak over the years for being the supposed "B-team" behind series creator Infinity Ward. Call of Duty: Black Ops handily dispels that myth. It's a bold and thoroughly comprehensive new iteration that only amplifies what we love about the series, with the largest and most entertaining multiplayer suite to date and another taut campaign filled with memorable events.

Amid the tense backdrop of the Cold War, Black Ops kicks off with an assassination attempt on Fidel Castro and never lets up, constantly bouncing you from one lively and violent scenario to the next. In typical Call of Duty fashion, Black Ops' campaign works at a fever pitch to keep events constantly varied and exciting, and scenarios like escaping from prison, digging through a pitch-dark rat hole, and swerving a jeep to avoid a plane crash easily rank among the series' top moments.

And unlike last year's blockbuster Modern Warfare 2—which often felt like a series of explosions held together with string and paperclips—Black Ops' story actually goes somewhere, with the tale of a captured special-ops soldier spinning into surreal territory as he flashes back to past missions in an interrogation room. It's a new direction for the series, but with historical icons and some perfectly placed period tunes, it's hard not to stay engaged until the conclusion, which comes with its own bizarre post-credits sequence.

Even a strong campaign feels secondary to the multiplayer portion, which tops Modern Warfare 2 as the series' best to date. Nearly everything we love about playing Call of Duty online is bigger and better, with loads of customization options and enticing new Wager Matches adding fresh energy to the experience. With great new maps, weapons, and killstreaks (like the RC-XD explosive RC car), plus the return of the co-op Zombies mode from World at War—we'll no doubt be playing Black Ops deep into 2011 and beyond.

Fears of Black Ops being a mere filler episode to hold fans over until the next Modern Warfare are thankfully unfounded. Treyarch's latest is a truly excellent shooter that advances the series and stands among the best entries to date.

MAKE IT YOURS

Black Ops' in-game currency system holds the key to all-new levels of customization, letting you unlock all sorts of equipment, perks, and killstreaks in the order of your choosing. Visual personalization is also key in *Black Ops*, as you can equip both facial and firearm camouflage and create your own user icon, which can then be imprinted on your gun, along with your clan tag.

...A TAUT CAMPAIGN FILLED WITH MEMORABLE EVENTS

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC DS

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

INFO

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Treyarch
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC, DS

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE

Extensive multiplayer options

GENRE

First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE

November 9, 2010

SUITABLE FOR

Anyone who appreciates expertly crafted gaming experiences

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WHAT'S GREAT:

- Expanded online suite means more to play and loads of customization
- Strong single-player campaign is packed with memorable events, plus a solid story
- Great presentation throughout, with stellar stereoscopic 3D support

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- Losing your hard-earned credits in a Wager Match

- Amazing multiplayer
- Intense campaign
- Creative customization

OVERALL RATING: 5/5

Wager Matches represent the greatest gameplay addition to Black Ops, with the tense six-player battles requiring you to bet in-game currency for the possibility of a bigger payout. Of the four modes, our favorites are Gun Game, which cycles you through 20 distinct weapons, and One in the Chamber, which gives you three lives, a knife, and one bullet per life—unless you kill someone. Aim wisely!

MULTIPLAYER

There are so many excellent multiplayer options in CoD: Black Ops. We love being able to tag weapons. It makes the Kill Cam especially fun.

SINGLE-PLAYER

Of course CoD: Black Ops is about more than just multiplayer. Treyarch put a lot of energy into crafting a compelling story.

FAN-TASTIC

Unsurprisingly, Black Ops is loaded with celebrity voice actors, starting with Avatar and Clash of the Titans star Sam Worthington in the lead role as Captain Alex Mason. Rapper/actor Ice Cube voices Corporal Joseph Bowman, while Gary Oldman reprises his role as Viktor Reznov, who previously appeared in World at War. Ed Harris and Emmanuelle Chriqui also voice characters in the game.

ANDY'S

Treyarch finally ditches its "also-ran" status (which it shouldn't have had anyway) with a new CoD that's stunning in its scope and presentation. It'll be interesting to see where the franchise goes next.

GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA

Decimate waves of enemies without getting out of bed • Words: Andy Salisbury

Red orbs expelled from my enemies' corpses have become my lifeblood. I've killed hundreds, maybe thousands, in the name of truth. I've "become" Kratos, and thanks to the tremendously addictive breed of action contained in God of War: Ghost of Sparta, I can't put down my PSP long enough to find out how poorly my Seahawks played. While real-world duties are important, so is single-handedly sinking Atlantis. (Spoiler alert: Kratos totally sinks Atlantis.)

Ghost of Sparta is the latest addition to *God of War*'s long, bloody, generally console-based history. And while we've become familiar with Kratos as a demigod, *Ghost of Sparta* teaches us about this red-and-white killing machine's time as the god of war, while also expanding his family's story.

Ghost of Sparta's style of action is nothing short of fantastic. Tearing apart droves of enemies, big and small—with stunning visuals that highlight every single chink in your armor and lick of fire—makes fighting your way through dungeons extremely rewarding, even considering the PSP's small screen. The fast button-pressing "quick time" events, which are instrumental to dropping monolithic bosses, are even better; their simplicity (and great rewards) make them a nice counter to the game's more drawn-out combat segments.

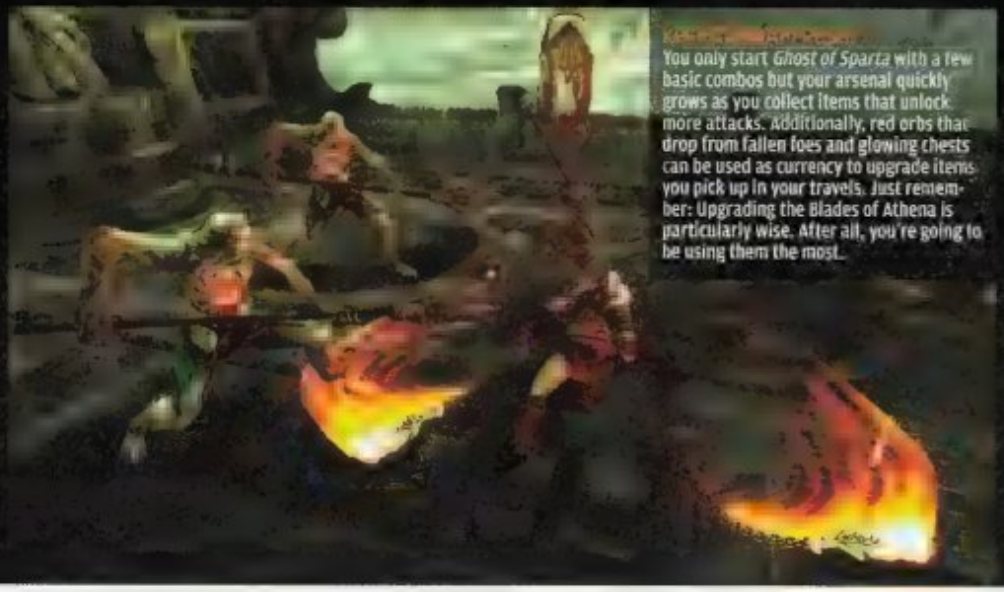
Great experiences on a handheld aren't limited to puzzle games or RPGs, and *Ghost of Sparta* proves that in a big way. Wildly addictive gameplay and stunning graphics make this a must-have for PSP owners dying for a dose of action.

ANDY SAYS:

Ghost of Sparta brings all of the trademark fury you know and love in the console versions of God of War—add in the fact that you can take it with you and you get a big win. This could be just what the PSP needs to revitalize its fanbase.

GAMEPLAY

While *Ghost of Sparta* focuses on action sequences, there are many puzzles—and they're not all during lulls.



You only start *Ghost of Sparta* with a few basic combos but your arsenal quickly grows as you collect items that unlock more attacks. Additionally, red orbs that drop from fallen foes and glowing chests can be used as currency to upgrade items you pick up in your travels. Just remember: Upgrading the Blades of Athena is particularly wise. After all, you're going to be using them the most.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA

INFO
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Ready at Dawn
Platforms: PSP

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
November 2, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Action junkies on the go

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Combat that's easily mastered
- Repeatedly stabbing the eye of a mythological beast
- Finding out just what happened to Atlantis

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Loading times can give you enough time to make a snack
- Being able to lift a huge metal gate, but having to push a small rock

OGAMER
- History lessons
- BIG game hunting!
- Antihero

OVERALL RATING: 5/5

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

The devs behind *Burnout* inject some new excitement into EA's racing workhorse • Words: Andy Salisbury

Racing games have become somewhat predictable. *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit* pumps a bit of fresh air into the long-running series' tires and revitalizes the arcade racers of yesteryear in an exciting way.

Hot Pursuit's substantial single-player campaign allows you to play either as the police or the racers. And while the racer's campaign is exactly the same as any series veteran would expect, rolling as a member of Seacrest County's finest takes what would have likely been a decent but forgettable experience and gives it a healthy dose of exhilaration. Chasing down unlawful speeders and stopping them by any means necessary (read: slamming them into walls at 160 mph) is insanely fun, and shouldn't be missed.

The cops vs. racers formula really shines in multiplayer, too. The addition of the human element breeds competition at a high level, making for some of the most riveting head-to-head gameplay available in any modern racer. Thanks to tools provided to both sides (such as EMPs and spike strips), the race to the finish line becomes far more than just going from Point A to Point B. Instead, you'll have to decide on the fly how to counter your opponent's EMP blast, avoid a head-on collision, and dodge the police Maserati lining up a massive sideswipe. It's quite simple but very fun.

Even though *Hot Pursuit* is undeniably a member of the *Need for Speed* family, developer Criterion's *Burnout* roots are apparent. Greatly exaggerated crashes are a staple, and while they're fun to watch, it's disorienting when the camera suddenly zooms in on an opponent that you wrecked—especially when it happens multiple times during a race.

While *Hot Pursuit* doesn't do anything too bold or new, the cops vs. racers angle proves a great formula for fun. The tracks aren't anything special, so the competitive, addictive gameplay easily steals the spotlight. If you've been waiting around for a strong entry into the arcade-racing arena, your wait is up.

Yellow lights mean slow down. Police barricades mean engage the nitro.

SHARING IS CARING

You're awesome, so you should show off. To help facilitate this, the game has a new camera mode that lets you snap high-speed action photos during races or just take beauty shots of your cars. These can then be posted to your Autolog wall and shared with the world. Just note that in-race photos are lower quality, making for grittier images.

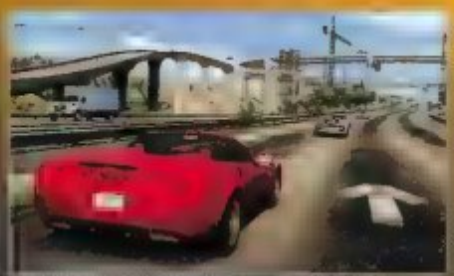
▲ Seacrest County's PD must have a heck of a budget—your tax dollars at work.

FUN FUN FUN ON THE AUTOLOG

At *Hot Pursuit's* core is the brand-new Autolog, which keeps track of your progress and shows it off to your friends. All of your track times, pictures, and progress reports will be displayed to the members of your friends list via a Facebook-style wall. Managed to beat a friend's time on their favorite track? Let 'em know... and issue a challenge!

FRIENDS LIKE US

If you're finding that you only have one or two friends to roll with, Hot Pursuit will automatically scour the friends of your friends to see if it can dig up some more racers for you to test your skills against. Best of all, it's a friends list independent to the game, thus preventing friends list spam.



ANDY

Yes, the "crash cam" can be disconcerting and annoying mid-race...but I don't mind enough to be upset. Watching someone pile up as you're doing your best to get to the finish line first delivers all kinds of coolness.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

ESRB E 10+

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Criterion Games
Platforms: PS3, XBOX 360, Wii, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8 players locally and online

GENRE
Racing

RELEASE DATE
November 16, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Arcade-style racing enthusiasts

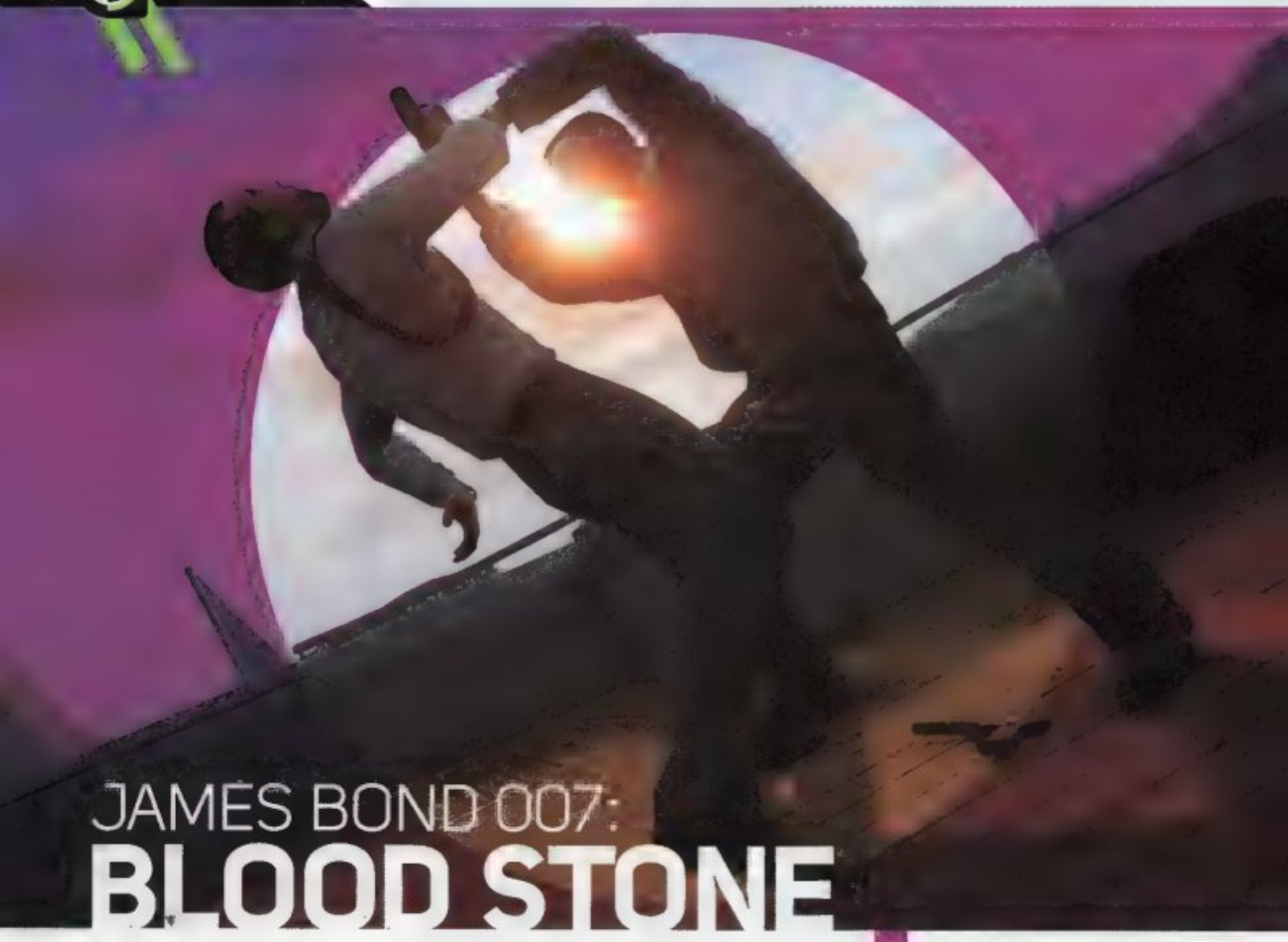
- ❤ Entertaining races
- ❤ High replay value
- ❤ Easy to compete with friends

- ✖ Constantly changing viewpoint quickly gets annoying
- ✖ Repetitive courses

GAMER

- Gorgeous cars
- Repetitive tracks
- Reckless NOS

OVERALL RATING: 4.25/5



JAMES BOND 007: BLOOD STONE

...aka "Contractual Obligations are Forever" • Words: Chuck Osborn

Arguably, a Bond game can be judged by how well it lets you embody the title character. On this basis alone, James Bond 007: Blood Stone is a rousing success. This third-person shooter manages to blend the best aspects of the Daniel Craig era of Bond in one game: intense gunplay, brutal takedowns, parkour-esque rooftop pursuits, and insane vehicle chases.

The game even manages to nail another convention of modern Bond films: inscrutable storytelling. Having finished the game, I have absolutely no idea what it was about; something involving a stolen biochemical weapon and a knife encrusted with a red diamond. Singer/actress Joss Stone voices socialite Nicole Hunter, whose sole purpose is to be the token "Bond girl." (Stone, as you might expect, also sings the theme song.) And, though movie-based games are rife with film stars who phone in listless voice acting, Daniel Craig and Judi Dench give dynamic performances worthy of a full-fledged Bond film.

Armed with a Walther PPK and a high-tech cell phone that enables you to see the locations of enemies behind walls, you (as Bond) cut a swath of destruction through five different exotic locales (Athens, Istanbul, Monaco, Siberia, and Bangkok). The Focus Aim system gives you the ability to lock onto and execute enemies with fatal precision, or you can take cover and wait for a foe to walk close enough for a stealthy ambush. Either way, the action is varied and action-packed, with cinematic sequences that bring those old Bond thrills. Each location is punctuated with a dizzying, high-speed race by car, truck, and even speedboat that teeters on being an over-the-top binge of explosions and destruction. Which is a good thing.

With the James Bond film franchise currently stalled while MGM sorts out its money woes, playing Blood Stone may be your only opportunity to enjoy an all-new Bond story starring Daniel Craig until... well, probably until the sequel. As the tag line says before the closing credits roll, "James Bond will return."

NO, MR. BOND, I WANT YOU TO HIDE

Always be on the lookout for cover. Even if you run out of ammo and can't find dropped weapons to scavenge, James Bond is a formidable fighting opponent. Just hide behind a corner and wait until a mark gets close enough to unleash a bone-breaking hand-to-hand onslaught.

ANDY SAYS:

There's one thing you can count on from the console and PC version of *Blood Stone*: good driving/racing action. Bizarre Creations did create the *Project Gotham Racing* series, after all.

▲ Bond always wears his wetsuit/anti-helicopter tuxedo for such occasions.

MAKING A GETAWAY IN STYLE

Once in every city, James Bond becomes embroiled in a high-speed chase sequence that would have real-life citizens suing MI6 in droves over property damage. These vehicular sprees come complete with fiery explosions, near misses with busses, falling architecture, and sexy sports cars most of us could never afford.

LI'L JIMMY BOND

While the DS version of Blood Stone wasn't reviewable at press time, this bite-sized Bond follows the same original story line as the next-gen versions set across seven different international locations. The gameplay includes stealth, hand-to-hand combat, cover-based shooting, driving sequences, and a four-player multiplayer mode.

BOND VS. BOND

▲

PS3 XBOX 360 PC DS

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

JAMES BOND 007: BLOOD STONE

INFO

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Bizarre Creations (PS3, Xbox 360, PC); n-Space (DS)
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC, DS

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE

Up to 16 players online

GENRE

Third-person shooter/racing

RELEASE DATE

November 2, 2010

SUITABLE FOR

Action gamers, Bondophiles suffering from withdrawal

WHAT'S GREAT

- The essence and excitement of the last two James Bond movies are flawlessly re-created
- Voice acting is spot-on; close your eyes and you might imagine you're listening to a Bond flick
- Insane vehicle races capture the craziness of Bond chase sequences

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT

- Weak, nearly non-existent story
- Graphics engine not quite cutting edge
- Joss Stone's character disappears for half the game

- Bond, James Bond
- Shaken, stirring driving
- Stealthy spying

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

▼ Starkiller retains all of his powers. Honestly, he's not much the worse for wear despite having died.

...the wrong side of a Force Lightning storm. You don't need that fancy Mandalorian armor, you need a rubber mat.

STAR WARS THE FORCE UNLEASHED II

Call in the clones • Words: Chuck Osborn

In Starkiller, the Force-juiced apprentice to Darth Vader, Star Wars fans get to experience the best of both worlds: a Jedi wannabe who dabbles on the Light Side but has all the raw power of a Sith lord. And given that Starkiller [spoiler alert!] allegedly died at the end of the first game, he (or his clone) is remarkably spry at the beginning of this sequel. From the start, you'll be able to pick up and fling crates with Force Grip or fry Stormtroopers with Force Lightning. To paraphrase The Geto Boys, dang it feels good to be a Jedi.

While the game looks and plays better than the first, the very linear storyline is one big, Jabba the Hutt–sized disappointment. Either cloned after the end of the first game or held captive by Vader—the story never reveals the truth—Starkiller escapes from his Sith daddy to find his lost lady love, Juno Eclipse. And that's as deep as the plot gets. Even Vader's evil plan to clone Starkiller (or did he already?) becomes an excuse to throw dozens of Starzombies at our mysterious hero late in the game.

The narrative might be a letdown, but the action remains stellar. Armed with dual light sabers and a couple new Force powers, Mind Trick (the ability to make enemies fight for you or commit suicide) and Force Fury (a temporary rage mode in which your attacks and Force powers increase exponentially), you can really rip into Rebel forces. Some levels and bosses are truly epic, making me think that the God of War franchise provided some inspiration.

STARKILLER ESCAPES FROM HIS SITH DADDY TO FIND HIS LOST LADY LOVE

Customization in the form of lightsaber crystals, Force upgrades, and unlockable costumes may give you some reason to replay the game, but most Padawans will tear through this short-ish (around six hours) single-player campaign faster than you can say "Rebel scum."

THE Wii UNLEASHED

Though it shares most of the same cut-scenes and story, the Wii version of *The Force Unleashed II* is a different game with a few unique features. First of all, the motion-based control scheme makes lightsaber battles a real workout for couch-bound Jedi. A couple of Starkiller's abilities are also slightly different, such as Force Fury becoming a slo-mo mode like bullet time. The graphics are scaled back considerably compared to the PS3/Xbox 360/PC versions, but Wii players do get something other platforms don't: 4-player multiplayer. In this mode, up to four players can battle it out with lightsabers and Force powers.

Grabby robo-spiders are worse than the Empire.

FREE FALLIN'

In a few sequences, you'll find yourself free falling through obstacle-laden environments like ventilation shafts and even a planet's atmosphere. (Hello, *God of War III*!) Move to avoid getting smacked in the face by debris, and don't be afraid to use the Force (Push and Lightning) to obliterate objects that can't be avoided.

ANDY SAYS:

We were super-excited about *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II*. Unfortunately the game's linear gameplay will dissapoint hardcore Star Wars fans.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC DS

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED II

INFO

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: LucasArts (PS3, Xbox 360), Red Fly (Wii), Aspyr (PC), n-Space (DS)
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC, DS

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE

4-player multiplayer (Wii only)

GENRE

Action

RELEASE DATE

October 26, 2010

SUITABLE FOR

Gamers who live and breathe *Star Wars*; action lovers

WHAT'S GREAT:

- Powerful Force abilities let you feel like a Jedi and/or Sith
- Large-scale environments and bosses
- Mind-tricking the weak-willed into doing your bidding

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

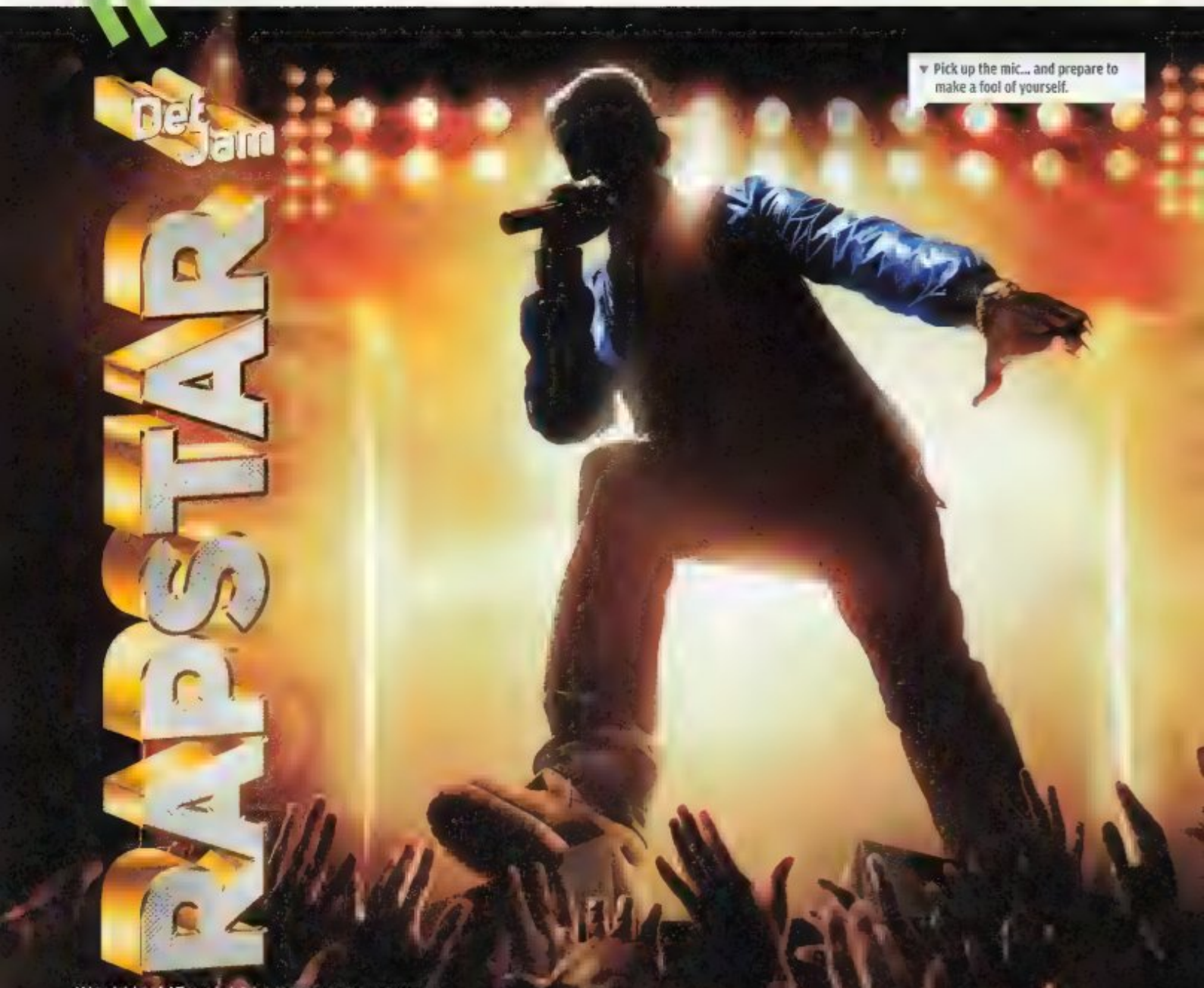
- A one-dimensional story that ends before it answers any of the questions it poses
- Repetitive enemies and very linear storyline

@GAMER

- Dual-wielding
- Jedi Forcing
- Destructible

OVERALL RATING: 3.5/5

Def Jam RAPSTAR



▼ Pick up the mic... and prepare to make a fool of yourself.

Would-be MCs rejoice! • Words: William O'Neal

It's about time someone does the hip-hop genre justice. For years, hip-hop has felt like the red-headed stepchild of the music-game genre, forced to ride in the back of the tour bus. But not anymore. *Def Jam Rapstar* finally gives the hip-hop music genre what it deserves in a game that covers a wide variety of music—and does it well.

Developed by 4mm Games, *Def Jam Rapstar* is simple enough. Like any other karaoke game, you grab the mic and rap along to the words as they appear on the screen below the original music video for the song that you're performing. If you have a PlayStation Eye or Xbox Live Vision camera, a video of your performance will also be shown in a smaller box. You can then record your videos and upload them to the *Def Jam Rapstar* website.

Of course, this isn't the first time a developer's taken a stab at the genre. *Singstar* immediately comes to mind, even though that game's interpretation of hip-hop was horrible. The thing with *Def Jam Rapstar* is that it was built around the Infernal Engine (the same engine that powered *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*). Its custom voice-recognition technology lets *Def Jam Rapstar* better interpret what you're rapping, whether or not you're saying it on beat, and whether or not you're in the right key. It seems to work well.

Def Jam Rapstar ships with some 45 songs that are pretty much all over the map. There's some old school, some new school, and a plethora of great artists to emulate, from the Notorious B.I.G. and Ice Cube to Salt-N-Pepa and Public Enemy. One drawback, though, is that in the attempt to appeal to a wide audience, there are a ton of songs that people haven't heard of. Of course, developer 4mm Games promises that the song catalog will be regularly updated, with new tracks continually offered for download via the in-game store.

All in all, *Def Jam Rapstar* is a great party/hip-hop game. Here's to hoping that those fresh tracks keep on coming.

▼ Love him or hate him, Kanye West is fun to emulate.

▲ Hip-hop history: While choosing the game mode, *Def Jam Rapstar* will give you bits of information about the various artists.

Artists such as the Notorious B.I.G. feature prominently in *Def Jam Rapstar*. As with any other karaoke-esque title, the better you know the song, the better you'll do.

ANDY SAYS:

I'll admit that I wasn't too optimistic that *Def Jam Rapstar* would pull it off, but it appears to be a well-crafted hip-hop game with lots of variety. Of course, if you aren't into hip-hop, there's not much to entice you, no matter how good it is.

HIP-HOP DONE HIGH-TECH

THE INFERNAL ENGINE

When you think about music games, high-tech doesn't immediately come to mind. While folks in the know may not be surprised, developer 4mm Games went with Terminal Reality's Infernal Engine as the tech driving *Def Jam Rapstar*. That's right...the same tech behind *Ghostbusters: The Video Game* is powering *Def Jam Rapstar*.

In *Def Jam Rapstar*, you'll rap along with the original music video, as opposed to an animated recreation.

▲ In addition to the original music video, the game records your performance, which can be uploaded and judged by your peers. That is, if you're thick-skinned enough.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DEF JAM RAPSTAR

INFO
Publisher: Konami
Developer: 4mm Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Two players locally

GENRE
Music

RELEASE DATE
October 5, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Hip-hop afficianados and those who love music games

WHAT'S GREAT:
- The best rap game ever
- Awesome for parties
- New songs released weekly

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Only 45 songs ship with the game
- Some of the newer songs pale in comparison to the classics
- The editing of songs to achieve the Teen rating is inconsistent

OGAMER
- Fun
- Finally
- Embarassing

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

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Xbox 360 accessory
DRAGO AGE
Better combat! Mor
READ OUR PREVIEW

FABLE III

Long live the revolution!

Words: Taylor Cocke

In *Fable III*, King Logan isn't having the best time as regent of Albion. He's managed to tax his people into deep poverty, anger his closest advisors, and even drive his own sibling into a rebel group. Whether that sibling turns out to be a lithe rogue, a scholarly mage, or a gigantic juggernaut is, as it tends to be with *Fable* games, entirely up to you.

You need to gain the support of the people in your campaign against Logan. That means appeasing the common folk actually affects the progression of the story, rather than being an amusing sandbox element. Finally, a purpose for goofing around in the world!

In exchange for their support, the poor Dwellers want their land back, the rebels in Bowerstone want improved living conditions, and the residents of Aurora want protection against the Lurker and his dark army, just to name a few.

After Logan's fall and your ascension, you learn that the Lurker plans to invade Albion and you need to raise a rather large sum for an army. Do you break your promises to your subjects, or keep them happy at their own peril? This dilemma is extremely compelling, it's just unfortunate the decisions boils down to black-and-white binary choices.

Only when you go out and check out the implications of your decisions does it really start to sink in. That lake you decided to drain in order to mine what was underneath? Yeah, that entire area now hates you, and it's become a depressing mining town. That sort of power is rarely seen in games.

Fable III's strength is the world it creates. I loved romping around the world as rebels and exploring the implications of my decisions. It's just unfortunate that my regency got in the way.

Common Sense
Quality boots are a requirement for any epic adventure. Wet socks suck.

Buddy System *Fable III* proves that the saying "There's strength in numbers" is true.

PARTNER UP!

Rather than *Fable II*'s lame, stripped-down co-op, you can now bring your customized character into your friends' versions of Albion, trade items (not all items will appear in your world, so to get them all, this is a necessity), build business partnerships—and, yes, even get married and have kids. The full-fledged co-op is a welcome change, and it's thoroughly enjoyable to quest with buddies.

BEYOND FETCH QUESTS

GET QUESTIN'

While the main story quests tend to be a bit on the basic hack-n-slash side of things, many of the side quests can be hilarious and original. One of our favorites involved three wizards asking us to let them shrink us down and playtest their new scenario in Fable's version of Dungeons and Dragons. We kept laughing the entire time while they argued over specific design choices and silly dialogue, all the while changing how the tiny world looked and acted while we were standing in the middle of it. It's clever, self-aware quests like this that make Lionhead Studios' games so charming.

▲ Everyone in *Fable III* wants something. It looks like these guys want to take home bloody swords.

▲ You've customized weapons. But weapons that customize themselves to you? Take a lot of damage, and your sword might gain a bone handle. Earn a lot of money and it'll become more ornate. It's a cool way to keep your character looking unique.

It's nice to see that Peter Molyneux didn't coast in creating the third game in the series. Solid co-op, strong customization, and having the player's actions affect the world make a great feature set.

XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

FABLE III

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Lionhead Studios
Platforms: Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2 player co-op

GENRE
RPG

RELEASE DATE
October 26, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
RPG fans who don't need number-crunching to have fun.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- The decisions that you make actually have a huge impact on the world around you
- The voice acting and design are both charming and hilarious
- The sandbox doesn't feel useless

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Ruling the kingdom could be done better
- A few minor bugs here and there

- Beautiful open world
- Difficult decisions
- Charming side quests

OVERALL RATING: 4.25/5

▼ When a DJ makes this hand signal you should run, immediately.

DJ HERO 2

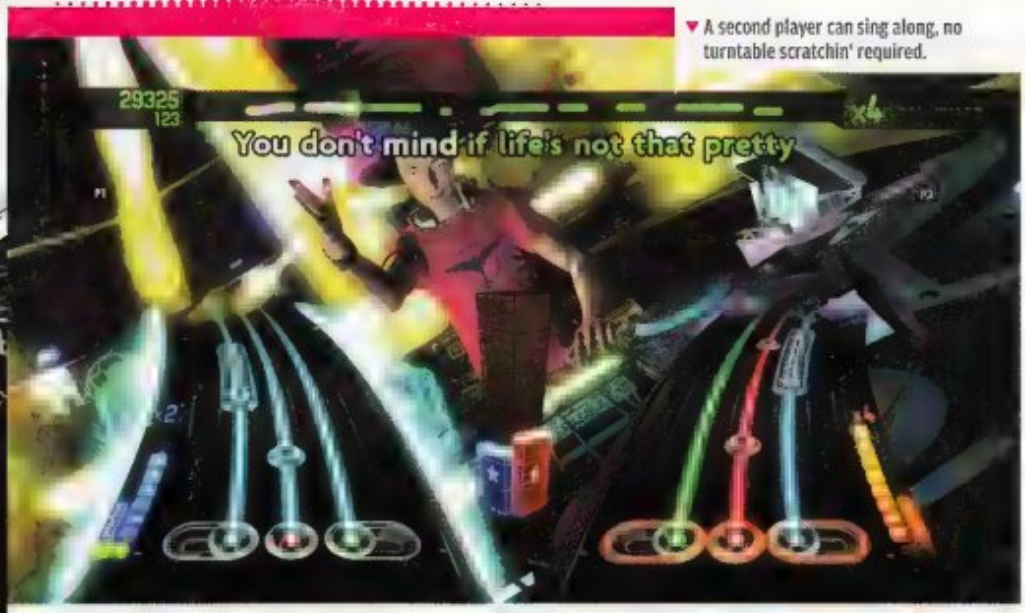
Two turntables and a microphone: the game • Words: Tom Price

▶ DJ or hipster? Sometimes it's hard to say.

The rise of music-rhythm games signals more than the beginnings of a significant new videogame genre. They also reinforce the concept of games letting you pretend to be something you're not: a rock god, a rap superstar, or some other king or queen of the stage. In the case of the *DJ Hero* games, you can be a master of the turntables—a dream that's maybe more common to the younger generation than to anyone over 30, but no less appealing. DJs can be rock stars these days.

Following the same basic formula as its predecessor, *DJ Hero 2* is a clever button-matching game featuring a unique turntable peripheral, that asks you to keep up with songs that are unique mash-ups of dance club hits and classics. This is accomplished by pressing buttons, switching the crossfader, and scratching on the spinning turntable, all at the appropriate times. There are other elements that help you initiate special modes that increase the multiplier, making your accurate inputs earn you more points. More points mean more stars, and more stars unlock more songs, venues, DJs, clothes, headphones, and other accoutrements.

The original *DJ Hero* did it really well, making for an experience that's just fun and challenging as a game, with the sense of immersion as a DJ being the whipped cream on top. The changes to *DJ Hero 2* improve the game in some very core ways, though. Singing or rapping along is a blast, and an easy way for friends who are befuddled by things like crossfading and scratching to join in and have a good time. For the hands on the mixer, though, the game's increased ability to freestyle is fundamental to that increased sense of immersion. While I would have liked a better way to translate my freestyling into points used for unlocking bonuses, I had a greater sense of creation with *DJ Hero 2*. It makes the experience far more satisfying, but more importantly it gets me excited about how subsequent sequels may give me even more control over the music, bringing me closer to becoming a world-famous DJ in real life.



▼ A second player can sing along, no turntable scratchin' required.

YO, DJ! GIMME THE MIC!

The addition of singing and rapping to *DJ Hero 2* is very welcome. In the first game, you could play along with a guitar, but that didn't seem to make a lot of sense. If DJs work with anyone, it's a drummer or a singer/rapper. The interface is well-done, too, no doubt thanks to Activision's experience with doing other games of the music-rhythm genre.

I HAD A GREATER SENSE OF CREATION WITH *DJH2*

TRACK LIST

One of *DJ Hero 2*'s weaker points is also one of its more subjective components: the track list. Many music fans use the track list to define which music game they're going to buy. And just because *DJ Hero 2*'s track list leaves a lot wanting for my tastes (far too little classic or '90s-era hip-hop) doesn't mean it will disappoint you. The Lady Gaga- and Kanye-heavy track list has some inspired mash-ups like Hot in Here meets Regulators, but Soulja Boy can take a hike.

LET'S BATTLE

Playing against another player brings a whole new component to the *DJ Hero* games. Battling head-to-head or just trading beats for your own enjoyment, playing versus battles is the best arena for showing off your freestyling skills. There are multiple multiplayer modes, but I would have liked to have seen even more.

WIL SAYS:

Thank goodness FreeStyleGames and Activision added singing and rapping. *DJ Hero*, at its core, is a party game, and the fact that *DJH2* supports singing and rapping makes it that much better.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DJ HERO 2

T TEEN ESRB

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: FreeStyleGames
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-3 players online or locally

GENRE
Music-rhythm

RELEASE DATE
October 19, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Closet DJs, rappers, singers, or those who just like to get their groove on

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The game remains one of the most delightfully challenging music-rhythm games out there
- ❤ More freestyling opportunities make for more replayibility
- ❤ The inclusion of singing/rapping makes this a bona fide party experience

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The song list is mixed, and often leaves a lot to be desired
- ✖ Would really like a better scoring system for the freestyle elements

GAMER

- Scratchtastic
- Spinderella
- In da club

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PS2 PC PSP

EVERYONE E ESRB

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2011

INFO
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Winning Eleven
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PC, PSP

MULTIPLAYER INFO
2-8 players online competitive, 2-4 cooperative

GENRE
Sports

RELEASE DATE
October 19, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Soccer fans, and FIFA players wanting to try a different flavor

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Impressive ball physics and player animations combine for realistic on-field action
- Some excellent player likenesses
- Online Master League

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Hit and mostly miss real-world licenses
- Twitchy controls aren't newbie friendly
- Jim Beglin is not an upgrade as color commentator

- Great step forward
- Tactical
- Online depth

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

PES 2011 does raise the bar for how realistically it portrays the action.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2011

Gearing up for promotion to the big leagues • Words: Rob Smith

Winning the videogame soccer fight against EA Sports' *FIFA* juggernaut would be soul-destroying for some developers. For an all-too-brief moment a few years ago, *Pro Evolution Soccer* earned the upper hand, with smooth and varied on-field action that shone beyond its presentation foibles and lack of real-world licensed leagues. Then EA Sports ramped up *FIFA*'s gameplay, and the war appeared lost. For 2011, Konami is storming back—not quite as a genuine title contender, but definitely showing renewed vigor that we hope revitalizes the competition in the coming years.

PES 2011's on-field action feels very different if you're a *FIFA* veteran. The total controls provide you with all the tools to craft moves and tactics how you want. It's not so simple for series newbies, as passes can easily go astray, and the touchy shooting in front of goal rewards very finely judged shots, while punishing sloppy

button mashes.

Realistic ball bounces and physics maintain *PES*'s reputation as a well-tuned re-creation of the beautiful game. All that is complemented by improved AI, where I saw my defenders follow their key player, not just run to the ball like clueless grade schoolers.

PES 2011 is an impressive step along Konami's path to giving *FIFA* a run for its gameplay money. I'll be playing until next year, when the gap could well be even closer.

ANDY SAYS:

It's encouraging to see Konami continue to improve its *Pro Evolution Soccer* franchise. It looks and plays great, and upping the competition should push both publishers to make their respective games better.

Mini Reviews:

Take a look at some bite-sized reviews for other games you might want to put on your shopping list.

Wii PARTY

Words: Andy Salisbury

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Nintendo EAD • Platforms: Wii

Run-of-the-mill sports games—your basic baseball, tennis, and bowling—have had their time in the Wii spotlight (to say the least). Now it's time to shake up the foundation of Mii-enabled games with Wii Party.

Wii Party offers 13 party games along with 80 new mini-games. Each is easy to learn and takes full advantage of the Wii's motion-based control scheme. Plenty of the games break out of the now-stereotypical shaking-and-waggling blueprint. For example, a couple of games take the activity off your screen and into the room by making you hide your Wii Remote from the other players, or having it produce a sound, which must be quickly identified.

Wii Party isn't groundbreaking, but it's still a great game that'll provide plenty of fun for friends and family looking to get the most out of their Christmas 2006 surprise.

Up to 4 players locally

Party

October 3, 2010

Mii enthusiasts

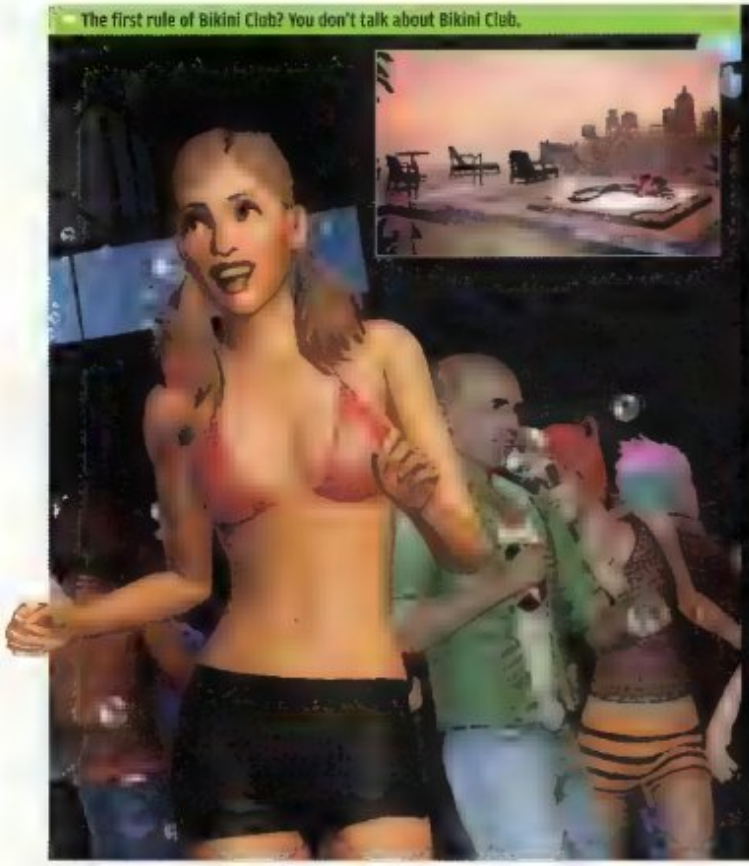
OVERALL RATING:

4/5

▼ While it might look easy, it's actually fast and frantic.

▼ Secret PETA footage allegedly showcasing wanton abuse of sheep and fish.

▼ The first rule of Bikini Club? You don't talk about Bikini Club.



SIMS 3: LATE NIGHT

Words: Meghan Walt

Publisher: EA • Developer: The Sims Studio • Platforms: PC

If you don't understand the concept of "being famous for being famous," consider *Late Night* as Celebutante 101. The newest *Sims 3* expansion refocuses the game, giving you a new downtown area filled with trendy high-rises and paparazzi-haunted hotspots, challenging you to schmooze and booze your way to a five-star celebrity rating.

Joining a band or bartending scores points, but you won't get top billing without impressing celebs. Sure, you get to avoid the working world, but have to socialize with Sims you'd rather ignore or fight.

A lack of creativity makes *Late Night* feel less like Hollywood and more like a city of hedonists—who incidentally have trouble navigating to and from parties. Still, the expansion's shortcomings won't stop you from enjoying some of the funnier moments of tabloid stardom.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Online trading

GENRE: Simulation

RELEASE DATE: October 26, 2010

SUITABLE FOR: The Sims' social enthusiasts

OVERALL RATING:

3.75/5

You won't miss hunting hours for that one tiny piece.

As in real life, nearly everything is destroyable and contains loot.

LEGO UNIVERSE

Words: Timothy J. Seppala

Publisher: LEGO Group (distributed by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment) • Developer: NetDevil • Platforms: PC

Who hasn't played with LEGOs? *LEGO Universe*'s core experience is just that: an MMO where you put blocks together any which way you want. Nearly every crate smashed and mission completed rewards you with bricks to build whatever your imagination desires.

When you aren't building, you're exploring. Each unique world is filled with tons of hidden goodies to find and areas to see. Mini-games, such as racing and a boat-shooting gallery, break up all of the pointing and clicking.

LEGO Universe feels incomplete at this point. The mission log doesn't say which planets each mission takes place on; there's little focus on team-based objectives; and (as of now, at least) there aren't enough planets to explore. Remarkably, though, that didn't stop us from having a blast.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Massively multiplayer
GENRE: MMORPG
RELEASE DATE: October 26, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: LEGO maniacs

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

KIRBY'S EPIC YARN

Words: Matt Cabral

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Good/Feel • Platforms: Wii

Insanely cute and endlessly clever, Kirby's latest is a breath of fresh air that should stretch a smile across the face of any gamer.

Holding the Wii-mote sideways—like an old-school NES gamepad—you'll platform and puzzle through a whimsical fantasy world anchored in an irresistibly adorable art style. Kirby, the land, and its inhabitants are creatively crafted from fabric, buttons, zippers, thread, and, of course, yarn, yielding an inspired visual feast.

The gameplay—which finds the pink protagonist fighting yarn-breathing dragons in patchwork-quilt kingdoms and sealing cloth volcanoes by pulling drawstrings—is fun for all, but definitely skewed toward the younger set. That said, you'll probably be having too much fun traversing felt fire pits and swimming aqua-blue string seas to notice any lack of challenge. Regardless of taste or skill level, you'll find *Kirby's Epic Yarn* as inviting as a cozy sweater.

2-player local co-op
Platformer
October 17, 2010
Knit champions, crochet heroes

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

Kirby's Epic Yarn is a wild vision, but the platforming fun comes easy.

POKÉMON RANGER: GUARDIAN SIGNS

Words: Andy Salisbury

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Creatures Inc. • Platforms: DS

Pokémon games generally put you in the shoes of a trainer who acquires and trains Pokémon for the purpose of battle. However, in *Pokémon Ranger: Guardian Signs*, you assume the role of a Pokémon ranger (who'da thunk?) who conveys good feelings towards Pokémon, enabling them to be captured. While the concept sounds silly, it makes for a great game.

In order to convey these good feelings, you use your Styler (a device attached to your wrist) to draw circles around Pokémon. The mechanic is a little weird at first, but it's easily mastered. What really helps break up the monotony of drawing circles are the more intricate Ranger Signs used to summon legendary Pokémon.

▼ Co-op is included, but doesn't add a whole lot to the game.

4-player co-op on local wireless

Action RPG

October 4, 2010

Pokémon fans of all ages

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

▼ Jump on your pokébird and take off on a combat mission! It's super effective!

▼ Only the most astute Koeiologists can accurately ID which *Warriors* game a screen is from.

▼ Co-op is one of the game's redeeming qualities.

SAMURAI WARRIORS 3

Words: Andy Salisbury

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Tecmo Koei • Platforms: Wii

We're all familiar with the *Dynasty Warriors* formula at this point: Pit one über-powerful player-controlled character against hordes of undertrained bad guys and let the melee begin. This recipe generally makes for a solid batch of fun, but *Samurai Warriors 3* manages to forget a couple of key components.

While the necessary droves of easily slain baddies are here, their brains aren't. Ripping through countless waves of enemies makes for a good time, but it may be disappointing if you're also hoping to be challenged. Plus, attack combos fall flat, resulting in repetitive combat.

If you're a big fan of slicing down entire armies where they stand, give *Samurai Warriors 3* a try. If you're seeking more depth, you might want to look elsewhere.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: 2-player online and local co-op

GENRE: Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE: September 27, 2010

SUITABLE FOR: Koeiologists, mainly

OVERALL RATING: 2.5/5

A-Z OF @GAMER RATINGS

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
A		
Ace Combat: Joint Assault	01	4
Alpha Protocol	01	3
Arcania: Gothic 4	04	3.25
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	05	4.5
B		
Backbreaker	01	3.5
Batman: The Brave and the Bold – The Videogame	03	2.5
C		
Call of Duty: Black Ops	05	5
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow	04	4
City of Heroes: Going Rogue	02	4
Clash of the Titans	02	2.5
Crackdown 2	01	4.5

D		
Dance Central	05	4.5
DanceMasters	05	4
Dead Rising 2	04	4
Def Jam Rapstar	05	3.75
DJ Hero 2	05	4
Dragon Ball: Origins 2	01	3.5
E		
EA Sports MMA	04	4.5
Enslaved: Odyssey to the West	04	4.75
Eyepet	03	3
F		
F1: 2010	04	4.75
Fable III	05	4.25
Fallout: New Vegas	05	4
FIFA Soccer 11	04	4.5
Final Fantasy XIV	04	3.5
Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light	04	3.75
Front Mission: Evolved	03	4
G		
God of War: Ghost of Sparta	05	5
Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock	03	4
H		
Halo: Reach	03	4.5
J		
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	05	3.75
K		
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	02	4.5
Kinect Adventures	05	4.5
Kinect Joy Ride	05	2.5
Kinect Sports	05	4
Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep	02	4.5
Kirby's Epic Yarn	05	4.5
Knights in the Nightmare	04	4.25
Kung Fu Rider	03	3.5
L		
Lara Croft: Guardian of Light	02	4.5
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	01	4.5
LEGO Universe	05	3.75
The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest	03	3
M		
Madden NFL 11	02	4.5
Mafia II	02	4
Medal of Honor	04	3.75
Metroid: Other M	02	4
MotionSports	05	3
N		
Naughty Bear	01	3.5
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit	05	4.25
Need for Speed World	02	4
NHL 11	03	4.5
NHL 2K11	03	3.5
P		
PlayStation Move	03	5
Pokémon Ranger: Guardian Signs	05	4
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011	05	4
Professor Layton and the Unwound Future	04	4
R		
Racquet Sports	04	2.5
Rock Band 3	04	4.5
Rock Band: Green Day	01	3.5
R.U.S.E.	03	4

S		
Samurai Warriors 3	05	2.5
Shank	03	4
Sid Meier's Civilization V	03	4.5
The Sims 3	04	4.25
The Sims 3: Ambitions	01	4.5
The Sims 3: Late Night	05	3.75
Sonic Free Riders	05	3.75
Sniper: Ghost Warrior	01	3

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5

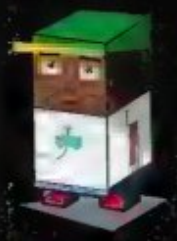
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	03	3.5
Sports Champions	03	4
StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty	02	5
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	05	3.5
Start the Party	03	3
Super Mario Galaxy 2	01	5
Super Scribblenauts	04	4.5
T		
Tiger Woods: PGA Tour 11	01	4
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2	03	4
V		
Vanquish	04	3.5
W		
Wii Party	05	4
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011	05	4
GEAR		
Able Planet NC300W True Fidelity Headphones	04	3
Alienware M11XR2	04	5
Creative World of Warcraft Headset	03	3
GeForce GTX 460	03	4
GeForce GTX 470	01	3
GeForce GTX 480	01	4
Gunnar Optiks MLG Phantom Mercury	04	3.5
Iomega Prestige 1TB Desktop Hard Drive	01	4
Kinect	05	4.5
Mad Catz Cyborg R.A.T. 7	03	5
Tritton AX 720	01	4
Turtle Beach: Ear Force X41	01	3
Western Digital My Book Essential 2TB External Hard Drive	01	4

Where to purchase:

ONLINE OR IN-STORE

Be sure to visit BestBuy.com to find out which Gear items are available in-stores and which are available online.

Words: William O'Neal



WIL SAYS:

After flying all the way to Frankfurt to check out *Crysis 2*, I was stoked to be able to experience the game in glorious 3D. Of course, while gaming in 3D isn't necessarily new, the fact that it can now work really well is. In this month's Gear section we show you how to get your 3D gaming experience up and running. *Crysis 2* isn't the only game getting the 3D treatment. In addition to *Mafia II* (pictured to the left) there's a whole slew of 3D-enabled titles to choose from, especially on PC.

3DTV HOW-TO GUIDE

Much has been made of 3D lately. With movies like Avatar and Toy Story 3 lighting up movie theaters, the time may finally be right for gaming to incorporate some truly decent 3D visuals. Indeed, 3D was an oft-heard buzzword during E3, to the point that there was backlash. Only recently have we been able to really get our hands dirty with 3D-enabled titles. It's one thing to get a demo, but setting up your own 3DTV gaming setup is something else.

When manufacturers first started talking about their new 3DTVs, we were obviously excited. The thing is, though, we weren't really sure if the content was there, whether on the television broadcast side, the movie side, or the gaming side. This all seems to be changing. As 3DTVs continue to come down dramatically in price, more people will buy them, and we know what that means. The more people snap up 3DTVs for their homes, the more content providers will be inclined to supply. A lot of folks wonder how 3D gaming will work. Sit back and we'll show you how. Or tell you, at least—it's hard to simulate on paper.

ONLY RECENTLY HAVE WE BEEN ABLE TO REALLY GET OUR HANDS DIRTY WITH SOME 3D-ENABLED GAMES

3D: IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK!

STEP 1:
CHOOSE YOUR TUBE

Everyone from Samsung and Sony to Panasonic and LG have jumped into the 3DTV mix. The key is price point. While the debate still rages around which is superior, plasma or LCD, it comes down mostly to how much coin you're willing to part with. We played Crysis 2 in 3D on a Samsung 3D HDTV and the game looked great.

STEP 2:
GOT GLASSES?

Of course, in order to game in 3D you'll have to rock those awesome 3D glasses. While Sony, Panasonic and Toshiba have gone on record to say that their 3DTVs will ship with 3D glasses, Samsung has not. Also, while the price of 3D glasses varies wildly, be prepared to add them to your cost-benefit analysis.

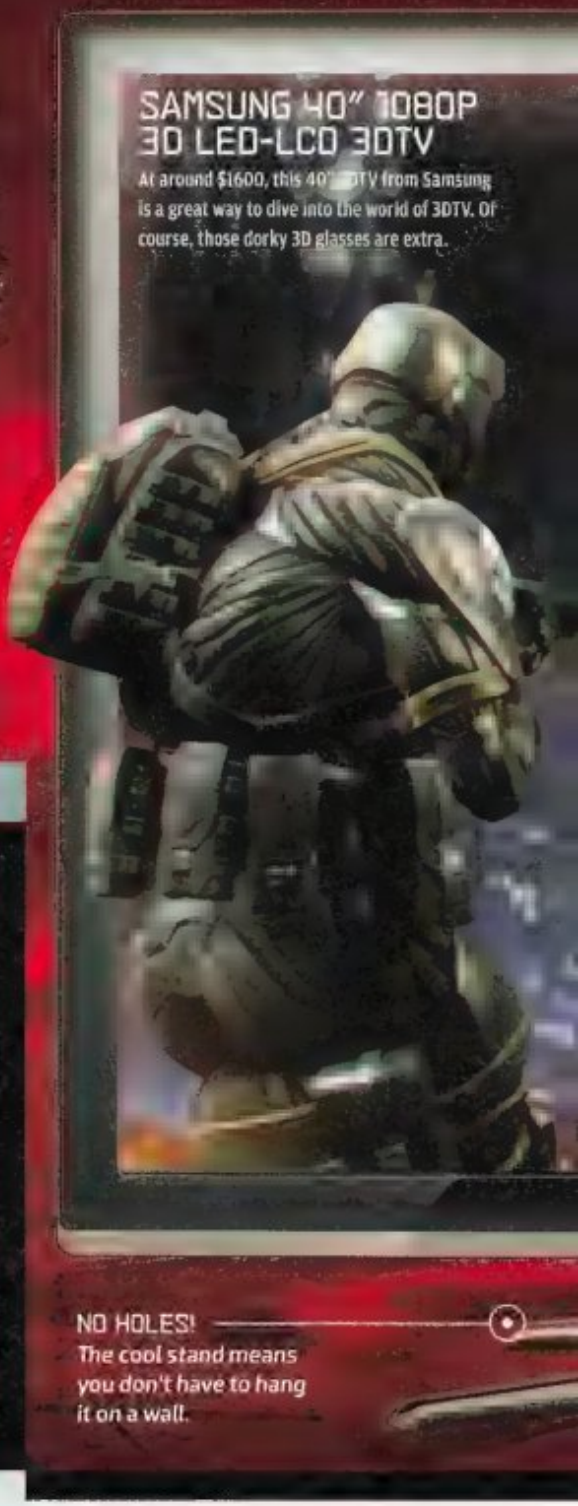
STEP 3:
CONSOLES?

With its built-in Blu-ray player, owners of Sony's PlayStaion 3 will have a much more seamless transition to 3D. In addition to gaming, PS3 owners will also be able take advantage of 3D movies that are released on Blu-ray. That said, Xbox 360 will also be able to get into the mix. It's just that Microsoft is being coy with the details.

STEP 4:
NOT SO CLOSE!

Many people are worried about eye strain during those epic 3D gaming sessions. One of the things to consider is how the 3D is implemented. If done poorly, expect some eye strain. Crytek put a lot of effort into ensuring that gamers won't hurt their eyes.

CONTINUED



SAMSUNG 40" 1080P 3D LED-LCD 3DTV

At around $1600, this 40" 3DTV from Samsung is a great way to dive into the world of 3DTV. Of course, those dorky 3D glasses are extra.

NO HOLES!
The cool stand means you don't have to hang it on a wall.

SUPER-THIN
The Samsung 40" LED-LCD 3DTV is only 1" thick.
3D GAMING
Games like Crysis 2, with their vertical enviroments, are great in 3D.
LED-LCD
Still relatively new, LED-LCD technology is plenty bright and responsive.

TOSHIBA SATELLITE A665-3DV6

3D to go? At around $1200 for the 3D package, the Toshiba Satellite A665-3DV6 is a formidable gaming machine.

STEP 5:
3D GAMING GOES MOBILE

Nvidia seems to have taken the lead in giving PC gamers viable 3D gaming options with its 3D Vision technology. A few manufacturers have teamed up with Nvidia to offer 3D Vision-capable laptops, with ASUS and Toshiba leading the pack.

STEP 6:
DESKTOP OPTIONS, TOO

If you'd rather beef up your current desktop gaming rig you can go that route. Our sister publication, *NVISION*, recently built a monster 3D gaming desktop powered by two GeForce GTX 480 graphics cards running in SLI. Couple that with Nvidia's active-shutter stereoscopic 3D glasses and a 3D-capable LCD display and you're good to go.

STEP 7:
WHAT ABOUT MOVIES?

The Toshiba laptop to the right ships with a Blu-ray drive. If you have a desktop we suggest the LG Super-Multi Blue Blu-ray drive. You might have to wait a bit until 3D-enabled Blu-ray movies become more common, though.

STEP 8:
MORE GAMES, PLEASE!

While there are plenty of games that support 3D, a few of the newer ones that do it well are Battlefield: Bad Company 2, Civilization V, Mafia II, and Batman: Arkham Asylum. A trip to Nvidia's website will give you a list of all the games that feature Nvidia 3D support.

IF YOU'D RATHER BEEF UP YOUR CURRENT DESKTOP GAMING RIG, YOU CAN ALSO GO THAT ROUTE

LAPTOP OR DESKTOP?
The laptop is probably the easier of the PC 3D options.

3D-CAPABLE LCD
The Toshiba Satellite A665-3DV6 has a Blu-ray drive to boot.

NVIDIA 3D VISION

On the PC side of things, Nvidia seems to be leading the way with its 3D Vision technology, a combination of a Graphics Processing Unit (GPU), 3D glasses, software, and a display.

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If you have some videogame "facts" you want to verify as real or urban legend, ask Andy: Send your questions to andy@atgamermagazine.com.

Corporate Punishment

Dearly beloved... we have gathered here today to get through this thing called... dissolution. (Apologies to Prince...)

The fact is, some game companies manage to stay pretty much the same and have a long life. However, most go through major changes, good and bad. Some go away altogether. This month, we're looking at a few in the latter category.

IMAGE: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/13191442

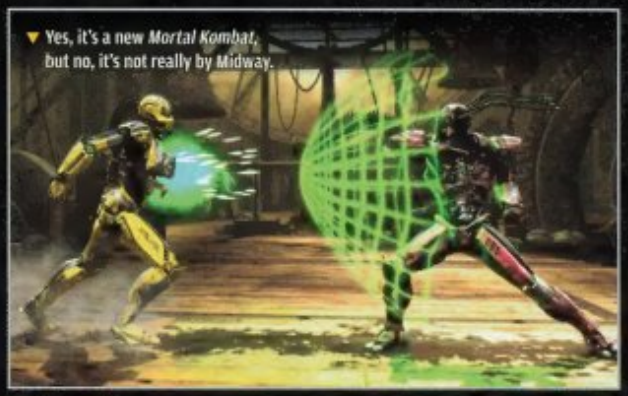
TRUTH OR LIES:

In the October 2010 @GAMER, you said that Midway "suffered a fiscal fatality of its own." That can't be... Midway was such a big company, and besides, I heard there's a new Mortal Kombat coming out next year. So, I think you're wrong.

LIES

It's certainly possible for me to be wrong. Just not this time.

Despite some high-profile game releases, a large number of Midway games didn't sell like the company had hoped. Its struggle to improve its business culminated with a bankruptcy filing in early 2009, followed by Warner Bros. picking up most of Midway for not much more than it would cost to develop one or two big games. Midway's Chicago studio became NetherRealm, and it's developing the next Mortal Kombat for Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment for a targeted April 2011 release. Look for an @GAMER preview in the near future.



▼ Yes, it's a new *Mortal Kombat*, but no, it's not really by Midway.

After reading in "Truth or Lies" about Blizzard and its StarCraft games, I seemed to remember that Blizzard didn't always publish its own games, as it does now. Am I right or is my brain turning to Spam?

TRUTH

I can't speak about the condition of your melon, but, hey, good memory on Blizzard.

Yes, in its earlier days, Blizzard just handled the development side of projects, while most of its creations were published by fellow Irvine, California, resident Interplay Productions. Going back further, Blizzard started its existence as a studio called Silicon & Synapse, then was acquired and ended up going with the Blizzard moniker, creating such games as Blackthorne and Lost Vikings. It later became part of Sierra On-Line, which in turn was picked up by Vivendi... which then merged its game properties with Activision, making the current conglomerate Activision Blizzard.

It's especially interesting to contrast Blizzard's path to success with Interplay's decline and somewhat demise; there are still efforts to revive the company with an MMO set in the Fallout universe, but we aren't holding our breath on that.

And, ewww, I'm never eating Spam again...

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TION
MH
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TEEN T Fantasy Violence Mild Suggestive Themes ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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